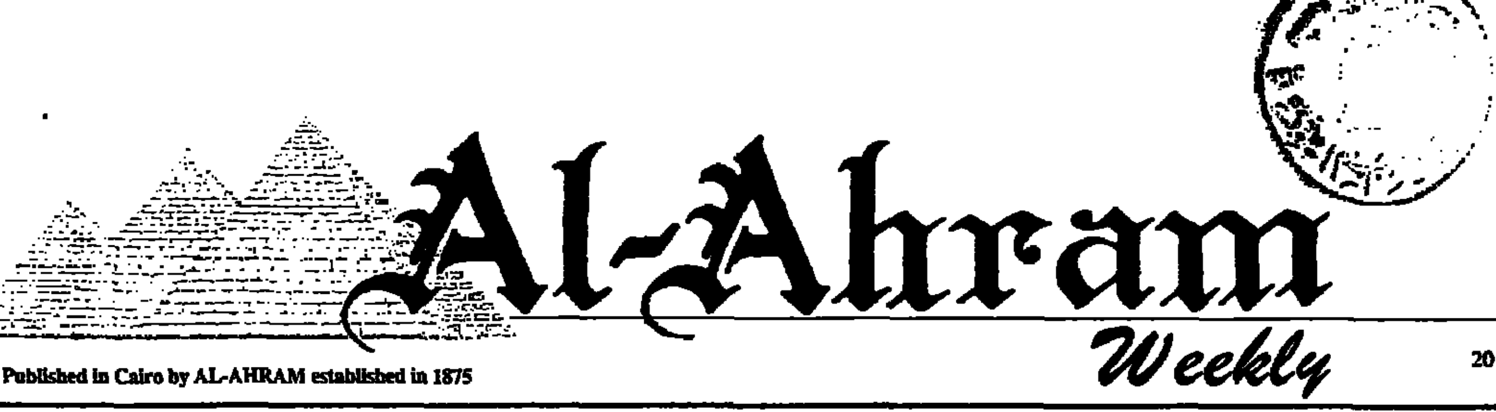




King Carlos, portrait of the week by Bahgory 8

No. 313 الاهرام ويكلي

Published in Cairo by AL-AHRAM established in 1875

20 - 26 February 1997 | 16 Pages | P.T.75

FBI chief in Cairo

FBI DIRECTOR Louis J Freeh will visit Cairo tomorrow for talks with high officials, including Interior Minister Hassan El-Alfi and Justice Minister Farouk Seif El-Nasr, reports Inas Nour. The visit is said to underline the ongoing cooperation between Egypt and the United States in the war against terrorism and drug-trafficking.

Before coming to Egypt, Freeh will visit Israel to discuss the fate of Moussa Mohamed Abu Marzook, a Hamas leader jailed in New York. According to The AP, Israel has had second thoughts about following through on its initial request that Abu Marzook be extradited to stand trial in Israel on charges of conspiracy to commit murder.

Algerian law

ALGERIA'S interim parliament has adopted a tough new law banning the creation of political parties along religious lines, in anticipation of the legislative elections slated for June this year. Tuesday's vote by the National Transition Council, an appointed parliamentary body, was considered a formality, as voters had already approved *constitutional changes to* the same effect in a plebiscite held last year.

The AP reported that the new law, banning parties based on religion, language and regionalism was promulgated to help avoid errors similar to those committed in the past, which led to bloody confrontations with Islamists. Some 20 small parties walked out during the debate and signed a petition asking for a number of amendments to be taken into account.

Algerian state television, meanwhile, confirmed newspaper reports that the government has offered a cash reward for information leading to the capture of leading Islamic militants. The reward ranges from $20,000 to $100,000, depending on the stature of the wanted individuals and their connections to crimes. In the latest violence, armed militants shot, hacked and burned to death 33 villagers south of the capital Algiers last weekend.

Plot thickens

THE MOTHER of Yigal Amir, the convicted assassin of Israel's former Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, claimed in an article published on Tuesday that her son did not act alone. She *insinuated that Shin Bet, the* Israeli domestic secret service, played a role in the murder, Reuters reported.

Quoted in the monthly political magazine *George*, published by John Kennedy Jr, *Guela Amir stated that her* son did not want to implicate others but that he was the victim of his closeness to right-wing militant Avishai Raviv, who spent months talking her son into harming Rabin. She claimed that Raviv was an agent of Shin Bet and involved in a plot aimed at discrediting the Israeli right because of Rabin's effort at peace with the Palestinians.

Mrs Amir criticised Israeli *investigators for not making* public what had been discovered about Raviv and his relationship with her son and suggested that both the Likud and the Labour Party preferred to keep the connection *shrouded in secrecy.*

Red alert

JAPAN ordered tighter security around embassies and other diplomatic missions abroad following the arrest of five suspected Red Army members in Lebanon, a Foreign Ministry spokesman announced yesterday.

The tougher security, AFP reported, aimed at countering any terrorist attack by the group which was active alongside Palestinian guerillas during the 1970s and '80s.

Japanese and Lebanese officials discussed on Tuesday the possible *extradition* to Japan of the five suspects after interrogation by Lebanese officials.

Har Homa holds Jerusalem

The future of the Netanyahu government, and of Jerusalem, could well rest on the decision on whether to build the Har Homa settlement, writes Graham Usher in Jerusalem

Despite demands from 40 Knesset members belonging to coalition parties, Israeli Premier Binyamin Netanyahu has so far evaded a Knesset debate on his government's building policies in occupied East Jerusalem. He is likely to hold out some more. On 17 February, Labour opposition members decided against supporting a Knesset no confidence motion for fear of being associated with Israel's far right. Thus even if the 40 Knesset members succeed *in getting the no confidence motion ta*bled, Netanyahu still has a Knesset majority through the votes of his "opposition" against those of his "coalition".

The controversy broke out after Netanyahu's trip to the US last week. Reports in the Israeli press stated that Ne*tanyahu had promised US President Bill* Clinton that he would not authorise the construction of 6,500 units (capable of housing some 35,000 settlers) for the Har Homa settlement in Jerusalem. The news was met with outrage by members of the Knesset and government ministers belonging to Likud, Third Way, the National Religious Party and Shas — all crucial elements in Netanyahu's governing coalition. This is because Har Homa has become a test case for Israeli ambitions to keep hold of the whole of Jerusalem in any final settlement with the Palestinians.

With its proposed site on Palestinian land in Jabal Abu Ghneim, Har Homa falls between Bethlehem and south Jerusalem. If built, says Palestinian geographer, Khalil Tafakji, it will "close the ring of settlements around Jerusalem," severing the last contiguous land corridor between East Jerusalem and the West Bank and removing all but the most symbolic Palestinian claims of sovereignty over Jerusalem.

This is why, according to Third Way Deputy Yehuda Harel, "it is very hard to imagine how [the Netanyahu] government can continue if it fails the Jerusalem test." It is also why, in the past, Palestinian leaders in Jerusalem such as Faisal Husseini have warned that the authorisation of Har Homa would not only "end the peace process," but also trigger "a popular explosion" of September proportions.

Not surprisingly, Netanyahu played down the controversy on his return to Washington. "I am amazed at what I am hearing," he told reporters on 17 February. "Is there anyone here who does not intend to build and pave roads in Jerusalem? There is no argument here."

Israeli sources say Netanyahu is unlikely to have given the Americans any guarantee over Har Homa, given the ructions the abandonment of the project would cause in his coalition. Rather, they say, he may defer the decision until next month, when Israel's first military redeployment after Hebron is due.

Most observers expect this re*deployment to be cosmetic, with no* more than two per cent of West Bank territory being transferred to Palestinian control. In Washington, US officials reportedly urged Netanyahu to yield up to 10 per cent of the West Bank to the Palestinian Authority (PA) in the 7 March *redeployment. Sources say Netanyahu* may do this in exchange for pledges of "quiet" from Yasser Arafat should the Likud government proceed with authorising Har Homa.

The official PA line is to reject out of hand any linkage between the further redeployments and Israeli construction in Jerusalem. Nor is Israel's military establishment any longer sure that a decision to start building Har Homa would pass "quietly", despite the progress in the Oslo process after the Hebron agreement and some improvement in the Palestinians' economic situation in the Occupied Territories. Speaking to the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee on 18 February, Israel's General Security Service (Shin Bet) head, Ami Ayalon, warned that it is "difficult to anticipate" Palestinians' responses to anything connected with Jerusalem given "the pressure on Arafat from the [Palestinian] street."

The "street", however, is likely to be the Palestinians' main mode of resistance in the coming battle over Har Homa. While Israel's Meretz faction has come out against the project, Shimon Peres' Labour Party is firmly behind it. "Our stand is clear," said Knesset deputy and probable future Labour leader, Ehud Barak, on 17 February. "We must build in Har Homa. The timing is a matter for the government to decide".

For the Palestinians, this means that any future struggle for Jerusalem should be based on the principle of their sovereignty in the city. It cannot be left to alliances with Israeli parties by virtue of their "opposition" to Likud.



ROYAL VISIT: King Juan Carlos and Queen Sophia of Spain began *a four-day visit to Egypt on Monday, their second in two decades, pri*marily targeted to further develop the already close relations between the two countries. Taking time off from a busy schedule, the royal couple visited the Giza Pyramids on Tuesday [above] and will travel to Luxor today.

The king and queen were given a state welcome, led by President Hosni Mubarak and Egypt's first lady, upon their arrival at Cairo Airport *Monday evening. In the course of official talks with Mubarak on* Tuesday, Carlos praised Egypt's economic reforms, urged a boost in bilateral ties and discussed the Middle East peace process and the Egyptian-European partnership. The monarch also voiced support for international cooperation to combat terrorism.

Mubarak later held a dinner banquet.in honour of the Spanish visitors. The king and queen also opened a library at the Spanish Cultural *Centre and visited a Spanish-funded restoration programme at Egypt's* National Library. Queen Sophia donated a number of Spanish literary and scientific books to the Greater Cairo Library.

Accompanying the monarch on the visit were Spanish Foreign Minister Abel Matutes and 50 Spanish businessmen. King Carlos presided yesterday at a seminar that explored the prospects of promoting Spanish investments in this country. The seminar, *organised by the Ministry of Economy and International* C/ooperation, brought together more than 100 Egyptian and Spanish businessmen.

King Carlos also met yesterday with Arab League Secretary-General Esmat Abdel-Meguid to discuss Arab-European relations ahead of a Euro-Mediterranean conference scheduled for April in Malta. *(photo: AFP)*

'A slightly different cast'

US Ambassador Edward Walker, in an interview with Inas Nour, unveils the agenda of President Mubarak's forthcoming visit to Washington

US Ambassador Edward Walker has conceded, possibly for the first time, that Washington plays a role that is supportive of the Israelis in the ongoing negotiations to establish a comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

Walker made the remark in the course of an interview with *Al-Ahram Weekly* that focused mainly on the agenda of President Hosni Mubarak's visit to Washington, scheduled to begin on 10 March.

Walker told the *Weekly* that the Egyptian and American roles in the peace process were not identical. "We would make a mistake to think [they are identical], and we would not be very effective, if we had identical roles," he said.

Since the signing of the Camp David peace agreements in 1978, it had become clear that Egypt "has an obligation and a role to play with the Palestinians, that is a supportive role, one which is designed to help them to reach an agreement," he continued.

The US, on the other hand, plays "a supportive role with the Israelis, also to help them to reach an agreement. Therefore, there is a slightly different cast on each and we believe that both of us, acting together, can help mediate the problems between the two sides, and encourage the two sides, and I think that's what happened... It's important to maintain the dialogue."

Walker described the timing of President Mubarak's visit to Washington as "good."

"First of all, we have a new foreign and security team that will profit from having the opportunity to talk to President Mubarak and Foreign Minister Amr Moussa. This in itself is an important element," he said.

"In the second place, we are moving into some very difficult areas in the Palestinian track of the peace process. We will want to consult about these areas. Obviously, moving into the final steps, discussions will be important, but also the full application of the agreements reached on Hebron [will be important], and then the other aspects of Oslo II still need to be applied. So we want to maintain very close contacts in that area."

Walker said the Egyptian-US economic partnership will also be high on the agenda of Mubarak's talks with President Bill Clinton and Vice-President Al Gore. "So the agenda is clear and full and it gives the president [Mubarak] a chance to talk to Congress, which is very important."

Gore is likely to visit Cairo this spring, Walker said.

Palestinians closing ranks

A RADICAL PLO organisation announced yesterday it was ready to drop the armed struggle against Israel and take part in the upcoming negotiations *that will determine the final status* of the Palestinian territories.

Qais Abdel-Hakim, deputy secretary-general of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) in the West Bank town of Ramallah told AFP the proposal was made in a message to Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat.

"The time has come for us to find common denominators between ourselves and the Palestinian Authority (PA) and the message [to Arafat] suggested some points to organise our relations," Abdel-Hakim said. "There must be agreement in the Palestinian ranks going into the final status negotiations. We would like a leadership agency including all the Palestinian movements to oversee the negotiations."

Nayef Hawatmeh's Damascus-based DFLP has been violently opposed to Arafat's Oslo agreements with Israel and, although it continues to retain a place in the PLO leadership, it has refused in the past to join the negotiations.

Farouk Kaddoumi, head of the PLO's political department, welcomed the DFLP's decision. Speaking to reporters in Damascus, *Kaddoumi said: "Undoubtedly the participation of all Palestinian* groups in these negotiations is very important." He said he hoped other Palestinian opposition groups would participate "so we can have a Palestinian consensus and Arab entente" on key issues.

Israel and the Palestinians are due to launch final status negotiations by mid-March to deal with the thorniest issues of their historic conflict. The Palestinians hope to emerge from the talks, due to end by *May 1999*, with an independent state.

Abdel-Hakim said the note to Arafat "contains no reference to the armed struggle. This is something we can discuss in the framework of the national dialogue."

On Saturday, Arafat called for the launching of a "national dialogue" between the PA and groups opposed to the peace process with Israel, including Islamist radicals such as the Islamic Resistance Movement Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

Arafat is due to lead the first session of the dialogue on 26 February in Nablus.

INSIDE

The road to Copenhagen: Lutfi El-Kholi Interview with David Kimche 9& 4





'Blood was everywhere' The *Weekly* in Abu Qurqas 3

Requirements for peace

PRESIDENT Hosni Mubarak met with Syrian Vice-President Abdel-Halim Khaddam and Foreign Minister Farouk Al-Shara' on Saturday to discuss the prospects of resuming the stalled Syrian-Israeli peace negotiations. Khaddam conveyed a message from President Hafez Al-Assad.

Foreign Minister Amr Moussa, who was present at the hour-long meeting, told reporters the Arabs are unanimous that negotiations on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks should not re-start from square one "just because the Israeli government is bringing in new proposals and does not recognise previous agreements."

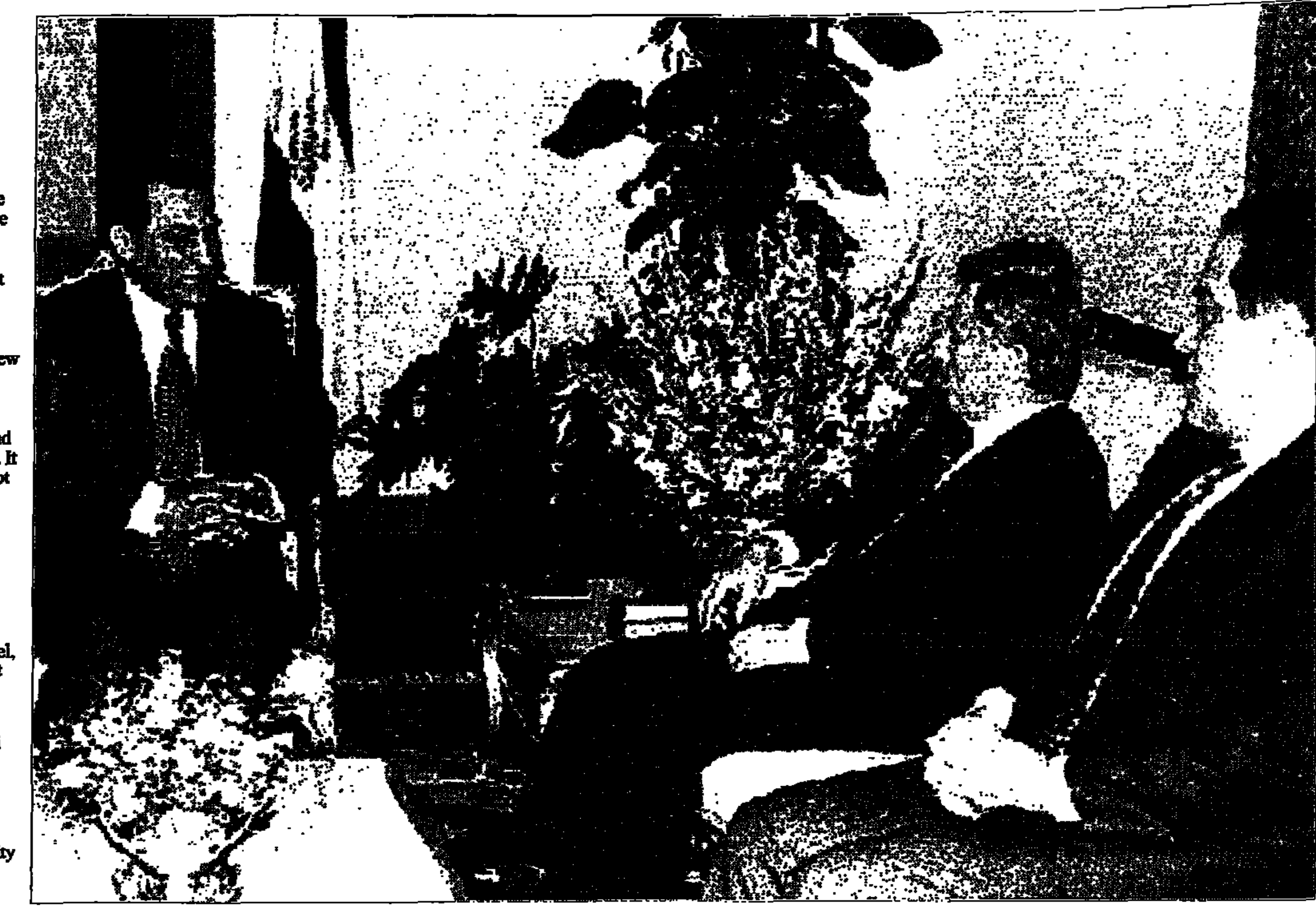
Al-Shara' said Syria was willing to resume the negotiations "from the point where they broke off and is committed to the agreements previously reached... It is the Israeli government which is avoiding peace, not the Syrian leadership."

Responding to Israeli allegations that Syria was dictating preconditions for a resumption of negotiations, Al-Shara' said: "There are no preconditions, but there are requirements for peace."

On Monday, Mubarak met with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, who stopped over in Cairo for a few hours before heading to Russia. Arafat briefed Mubarak on the situation in the peace talks with Israel, declaring that "since the conclusion of the agreement on Hebron, nothing has been implemented."

"Settlement activity and the expropriation of Palestinian land continue," Arafat told reporters, adding that Israeli "violations" escalated, with Israeli authorities confiscating the identification papers of Palestinians living in Jerusalem and preventing Muslim and Christian worshipers from praying at mosques and churches.

He suggested that an Arab or Islamic summit on Jerusalem should take place soon because the holy city "is of concern to all Arabs, both Muslim and Christian."



Legal wrangle at the Press Syndicate

An administrative court has thrown out a lawsuit contesting the Press Syndicate's plan to organise elections to fill the chairman's post. As Shaden Shehab reports, opinions are divided over the implications of the court's decision



The administrative court of the State Council threw out last Sunday a lawsuit filed by a leading journalist contesting a decision by the Press Syndicate's Council to organise elections on 27 March to fill the chairman's post. The court said it found the lawsuit unacceptable because the decision to organise the elections was not the responsibility of the Syndicate's Council but is the prerogative of a judicial committee entrused by law with supervising the elections of professional unions. No decision has been taken yet by the judicial committee.

The lawsuit was initiated by Mahmoud El-Tohami, board chairman of Rose El-Youssef, who demanded that Ibrahim Nafie, board chairman of the Al-Ahram Organisation, should be allowed to serve as the Press Syndicate's chairman for two more years.

El-Tohami based his demand on the fact that Law 100 for 1993 that provides "democratic guarantees for trade and professional unions" stipulates that the council of a professional union is elected for a four-year term. Nafie was last elected in March 1995.

The legal dispute resulted from the fact that the Press Syndicate's activities are regulated not only by Law 100 but also by Special Syndicate Law 76 of 1976. There are some discrepancies between the provisions of the two laws.

Under the Press Syndicate law, the chairman is elected every two years for a maximum of two consecutive terms. Moreover, six of the 12 members serving on the Syndicate's Council should be chosen by lot to contest the elections along with the candidates for the chairman's post. But Law 100, on the other hand, stipulates that elections for the Syndicate's Council should take place every four years. Journalists are divided as to whether this provision is applicable to the chairman as well as council members or to the council members only.

To avoid any legal pitfalls, the Syndicate's Council decided last month to accept nominations for the chairman's post between 12 and 17 March and scheduled the elections for 27 March.

Explaining the implications of the court's decision, Nafie told *Al Ahram Weekly* that "the court took the position that the decision to allow candidates to run for election is the sole responsibility of the judicial committee, which means that the decision taken by the Syndicate's Council is illegal." This, he added, means that the plan to organise elections on 27 March has to be scrapped.

Nafie said that the "judicial committee is the body that will decide whether there will be elections for the chairman's post this year or not. There is no specific time frame within which this decision must be taken."

Nafie added, however, that since journalists are divided on the issue, it is likely that some of them will contest the decision that will be taken by the judicial committee. "Thus, the case will be sent back to the administrative court which will have to decide whether Law 100 or Law 76 is applicable."

Esmat El-Hawwari, the Syndicate's lawyer, disagreed with Nafie's interpretation of the court's decision. He said that "even if the final word of the administrative court is to follow Law 100, elections should still take place." He explained that "Nafie was elected under the Press Syndicate law, and not Law 100, for a two-year term. But now if we have to follow Law 100, new elections must be organised and Nafie can nominate himself for a new term."

Mahfouz Shouman, chairman of the judicial committee, could not be reached for comment.

High tech green

State-of-the-art environmental protection technologies were introduced at a major conference and trade fair this week. Sherine Nasr reports

Environmentalists, government officials, representatives of international donor organisations, and industrialists from both the public and private sectors gathered for three days last week at Environment '97: The First International Conference and Trade Fair on Environmental Management and Technologies. Held under the auspices of Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri, the conference featured more than 100 speakers representing some 60 countries, discussing a variety of environment-related issues. Among the major topics considered during the conference's 28 sessions were urban air pollution, hazardous waste management, environmental education, training and awareness, and energy and coastal zone management.

"This is the largest conference ever held in the Middle East and North Africa," said Tarek Genina, General Director of the Techniqual Cooperation Office for the Environment. "The ultimate goal is to exchange experiences and keep abreast of the latest trends and technologies in the environmental field," said Salah Hafez, Chief Excutive of the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency.

"There is almost 20,000km of coastal land, biologically diverse and rich in natural resources. It is the role of the EEAA to ensure that the land is used in such a way as to sustain this natural life."

As the key player in implementing the government's national environment protection plan, the EEAA has allowed industries and others carrying out environment-polluting activities a three-year grace period to comply with the Environment Law Number Four, issued in 1994, Hafez said. "Factories and petrol stations are busy trying to meet the legal requirements. Meanwhile, records of their waste management are monitored by the EEAA."

Prominent officials among the guests included Venice Kamel, minister of scientific research, Atef Ebeid, minister of the public business sector and minister of state for environmental affairs and Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, minister of defence and military production, in addition to the governors of Cairo, Giza, Ismailia, Marsa Matrouh and Gharbiya.

Atef Ebeid underlined the role the private sector can play in protecting the environment. "We are now working closely with the private sector to solve many serious environmental problems," he said. "A new culture is being promoted, which holds that protecting the environment is not a financial burden, but an opportunity to create a more profitable business." He paid special tribute to USAID, Canada and Japan for supporting and financing a large number of environment-related projects in Egypt. According to Hafez, the volume of international donor aid to support healthier environmental practices in Egypt amounted to $130 million in 1996.

Mohamed El-Ashri, chief executive officer and chairman of Global Environment Facility (GEF), expressed concern at the continuing decline of the environment, both locally and internationally. He stressed that money alone will not solve the problem. "Funding is important but it is not enough," he said. "Adequate financing without adequate policies and strategies will not achieve the intended goals. With problems such as the consumption of resources, population growth and energy transport systems, the right policies count, and this is what gives this event special importance."

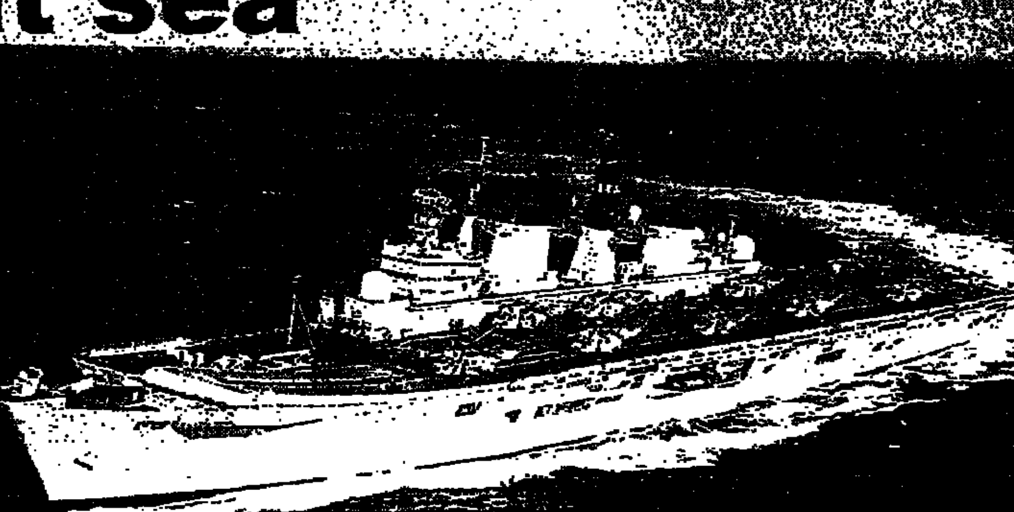
Egypt, like other developing countries, needs concessional funding to allow it to invest in modern environmental technologies. The GEF, through its implementing agents, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank, is addressing a large number of environment-related issues in Egypt, including energy efficiency, renewable energy, biodiversity, coastal zone management, marine pollution and land degradation. The GEF works as a catalyst and facilitator to liaise between national and international bodies. "We add a global dimension to the Egyptian initiative for national sustainable development," El-Ashri explained.

Three leading environmentalists were decorated with merit awards in the course of the event: Mustafa Kamal Tolba, ex-director of the UNEP, Mohamed Abdel-Fattah El-Qassas, director of the National Biodiversity Unit and one of the main figures who led the environmental protection movement in this country, and Osama El-Kholi, a prominent ecologist.

The opening of a trade fair for the world's most up-to-date environmental technologies, products and services was timed to coincide with the conference. More than 125 participants from countries including Egypt, Denmark, Finland and Germany took part, exhibiting technologies ranging from oil spill detection and fighting apparatus to hygienic cleanliness products, in addition to environment monitoring stations, noise monitoring systems, sewage treatment plants and energy conservation equipment.

Jan Hyttel's Danish company, which sells equipment for waste water management and sewage treatment, was among the exhibitors. "We believe that our technology will prove most effective in Egypt, particularly in the Red Sea area, where a large number of hotels and resorts are now being built," he said. His company's system, which can recycle water up to three times, is easy to operate and inexpensive. "We have found an Egyptian partner to manufacture and market the product in local markets," he added.

Brits at sea



A BRITISH Navy task force, on its way to the Asia-Pacific region, which arrived in the waters off Alexandria last Friday, set sail again on Monday, and will be passing through the Suez Canal today on its way to the Red Sea and Indian Ocean, reports **Galal Nassar**. Led by the aircraft carrier Illustrious, the group includes about 20 surface ships, submarines and support vessels, and 7,500 officers and men. The task force left Britain in January and will return in August.

The group's commander, Rear-Admiral Alan West, told reporters at a press conference aboard the HMS Illustrious, that Britain's participation in the Bright Star exercise, scheduled for the end of this year, had been discussed in talks with Egyptian naval commanders. Britain will be represented by a destroyer and a frigate, he said.

A spokesman for the group said the deployment to the Asia-Pacific, known as Ocean Wave 97, is intended to demonstrate Britain's continuing commitment to the region and the Royal Navy's ability to deploy an operationally effective and self-sustaining maritime force east of Suez for a prolonged period. This force, he said, demonstrates the three key capabilities of the Royal Navy — a carrier task force, nuclear-powered submarines and amphibious forces.

The composition of the group will change during the course of the deployment, but the ships assigned for the duration will be the Illustrious, the assault ship Fearless, the guided-missile destroyer Gloucester, the frigates Beaver and Richmond, the submarine Trenchant and seven fleet auxiliaries — the replenishment ships Fort Austin and Fort George, the logistic landing ships Sir Galahad, Sir Geraint and Sir Percivale, the fleet tanker Olna and the forward repair ship Diligence.

The task group will be joined for periods of up to three months by the frigates Chatham and Iron Duke, the submarine Trafalgar and the survey ship Herald.

The group will take part in several exercises, the two most important being Flying Fish, an air defence and anti-submarine exercise off Malaysia with forces from the other Five Power Defence Arrangement countries — Malaysia, Singapore, Australia and New Zealand — and Setia Kawan, an amphibious exercise with the Brunei armed forces.

The Ocean Wave ships will also take part in exercises with a number of regional navies and will gain further experience of operating the Sea Harrier F/A 2 and the Lynx HMA 8 helicopter in hot weather conditions. In March, Royal Air Force Harrier GR7s will undertake hot weather trials in the Indian Ocean from the Illustrious.

There will be visits, usually by one or two ships, to many countries during the deployment. The exact programme has still to be finalised but, once east of Suez, it is hoped to include visits to Abu Dhabi, Pakistan, India, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia, Japan, Vietnam, South Korea, Russia, the Philippines, New Zealand, Australia and South Africa.

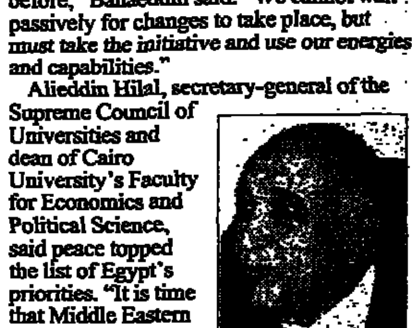
According to current plans, HMS Chatham and RFA Sir Percivale will be in Hong Kong in June 1997 when the territory is handed back to China.

Academics discuss world peace

Representatives from 150 Egyptian, Arab and foreign universities gathered in Aswan this week to debate the role of universities in establishing world peace. Mohamed Habib reports

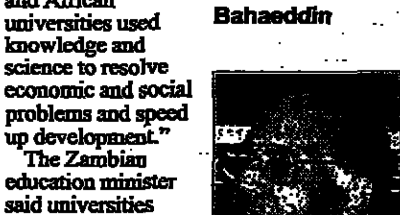
As diplomatic efforts were increased to arrange a resumption of Syrian-Israeli peace negotiations and resolve outstanding Palestinian-Israeli problems, representatives of 150 universities from 42 countries met in Aswan to discuss the universities' role in promoting world peace. The salient theme at the four-day conference was how to use education, particularly university education, for resolving disputes and conflicts. The conference, which ends today, was organised by the Africa and Middle East Council of the International Association of University Presidents.

Inaugurating the conference on Monday, Education Minister Hussein Kamel Bahaeddin said that Egypt fought wars in the past to establish peace in the Middle East and then spearheaded the drive for a comprehensive peace in the region. "The world, as it stands at the threshold of the 21st century, needs peace more than ever before," Bahaeddin said. "We cannot wait passively for changes to take place, but must take the initiative and use our energies and capabilities."



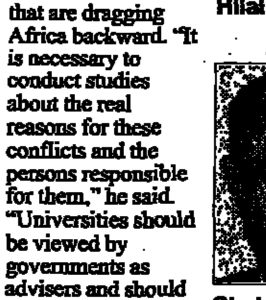
Bahaeddin

Alieddin Hilal, secretary-general of the Supreme Council of Universities and dean of Cairo University's Faculty for Economics and Political Science, said peace topped the list of Egypt's priorities. "It is time that Middle Eastern and African universities used knowledge and science to resolve economic and social problems and speed up development."



Hilal

The Zambian education minister said universities faced the responsibility of defusing the tribal conflicts and wars that are dragging Africa backward. "It is necessary to conduct studies about the real reasons for these conflicts and the persons responsible for them," he said. "Universities should be viewed by governments as advisers and should be given the responsibility of preparing development programmes."



Shalabi

Donald Gers, chairman of the international association, lamented that several countries remain backward as a result of tribal wars and conflicts. "Universities should play a leading role in the quest for peace, stability and development," he maintained. "Without this role, there will be no peace."

Dr Abdel-Hamid Shalabi, vice-president of the Suez Canal University and chairman of the International Association's Africa and Middle East Council, said the conference was debating the obstacles facing world peace from all angles.

The Palestinian representative, Riyad El-Khoudewy, said Palestinian universities "can play a leading and prominent role in the regional peace process if restrictions on the movement of professors and students between various Palestinian universities, even Israeli universities, are suspended or removed. Our Israeli neighbours must realise that times have changed, and it is for the benefit of the region that mutual recognition of rights takes place."

El-Khoudewy said Israel and the Palestinian Authority should work together toward these objectives: a safe passage between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank to improve the economic and human situation in the Palestinian territories; permission for the Palestinian Authority to use the Gaza airport; permission to start the construction of a harbour in Gaza to facilitate Palestinian exports and imports; payment to the Palestinian Authority of its share — 75 per cent — of taxes and revenues collected by Israeli authorities from the Palestinians; the halting of Israel's policy of establishing and expanding settlements; leaving the future of East Jerusalem until the final status negotiations.

Mordechai Shechter, rector of Haifa University, said the peace process in the Middle East has created a new reality. "In the face of enormous difficulties, barriers and fears, arising from years of conflict, war and bloodshed, a new orientation of dialogue and reconciliation has taken place," he stated. "So far this has been a process led mostly by politicians and military officials. But peace can never be solely an absence of war. The need for building cultural bridges between the peoples of this region, in order to help extend peace beyond the level of the political elite to reach the man in the street, is crucial. Promoting a shared civility becomes vitally important for the future of peace and coexistence."

Shechter said that Israeli and Palestinian academics, as well as "colleagues everywhere in the region should join forces in a battle where words will serve as weapons in the positive, academic sense" — carriers of exalted ideas, wisdom and humanity's accumulated body of knowledge. This battle should "annul the damage perpetrated by those other, poisonous words" of hatred and malice.





The killing of 12 Christians in the southern town of Abu Qurqas left the villagers in a state of shock and despair. Men buried the dead and received condolences, while grieving women screamed and wept for the victims

photos: Amr Nabil

'Blood was everywhere'

The killing of 12 Christians in Upper Egypt last week sent shock waves through the nation, raising fears that Islamist militants were unleashing a new wave of violence. **Amira Howeidy** visits the grief-stricken town of Abu Qurqas

The church of Mar Guirgis (St George) in Al-Fekriya, near the town of Abu Qurqas in Al-Minya governorate, was overwhelmed by grief last Friday. A group of around 30 men were gathered inside. They mostly sat in silence, their reverie broken from time to time as they rose to greet relatives, friends and neighbours who came to offer condolences for the deaths of nine Christians in a shooting attack at the church two days earlier.

The church walls were dotted with bullet holes, *its floor and wooden benches still stained with* blood.

On 12 February, gunmen burst into the church while a weekly youth meeting was in progress. Nine young people were killed and six others wounded. A day later, the bodies of three other Christians were found in nearby fields with bullets in their heads, bringing the death toll to 12.

Security forces later sealed off the streets leading to the church and stationed armoured vehicles around Abu Qurqas.

According to the Interior Ministry, the attack was carried out by five suspects, believed to be members of the underground Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya, who later took refuge in sugar cane fields. A ministry statement said the identities of the five, and that of their leader, had been established.

The state-run television broke into its regular 6pm news bulletin on Saturday to broadcast the names of the six suspects, show their photographs and urge the public to provide information about them. The leader of the group was named as Farid Salem Abdel-Qader Qedwani, *described as the "emir* of terrorism in Abu Qurqas."

The massacre was the worst to target Christians since 1992, when Islamist extremists gunned down 12 Christian villagers. According to the Egyptian Organisation for Human Rights (EOHR), 86 Christians have been killed since then, mostly in the Governorate of Assiut.

Apart from the armoured vehicles patrolling the streets of Al-Fekriya — a common sight during the past few years — the town seemed peaceful and quiet. But inside the homes of its Christian residents, there was grief, fear and anger. "It all happened in a few seconds, maybe half a minute. Everyone fell to the floor and blood was everywhere," said the Rev. Makarios Youssef, who was inside the church at the time of the attack, hearing confessions *in the sanctuary*.

"I heard heavy shooting, followed immediately by screams. The whole place was in chaos. A few managed to take shelter in the sanctuary. I saw two young girls crawling towards me and I pulled them inside. To my right, I saw a young boy, who had been shot in the back, calling to me in a faint voice. By the time I pulled him in, the shooting was over and the gunmen had fled," he told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

According to witnesses outside the church, the at*tack was carried out by five gunmen between* 7.30 and 7.40pm. One secured the church's main gate, another the inner gate, while two or three others opened fire with automatic weapons inside the church. The five escaped on foot, running in the direction of sugar cane fields which are only 100 metres away.

Had the attack occurred on another day, it would probably have resulted in even more casualities. The Wednesday meeting is usually attended by around 200 people. But on 12 February, the number *had dropped to about 40 because lots of young people* were away for the *Eid El-Fitr* holiday, Youssef said.

According to the priest, the church was an easy target because it had not had a police guard for the past 14 months. "They were withdrawn after two of them were killed in the Governorate of Qena and their weapons stolen by Islamist militants," he said. He denied reports that the church had requested that the guards be withdrawn.

Before the incident, anyone could walk into the church without being questioned. "This is a place of worship," explained Rev. Youssef. "We cannot interrogate people before they enter because we cannot question their intentions."

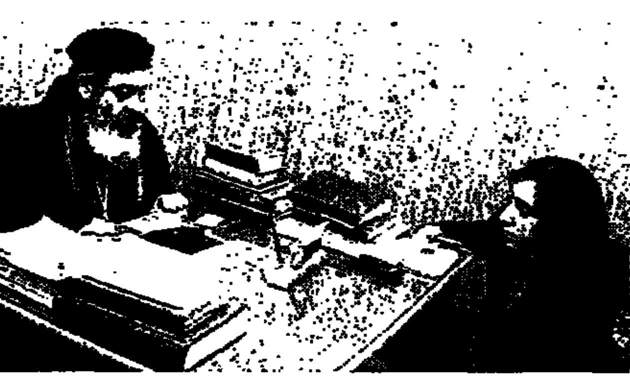
However, the attack has provoked him to demand an armed police checkpoint at the beginning of the *road leading to the church.*

Other clergymen at the church, who asked that their names be withheld, believe the authorities fail to guard Christian establishments adequately in spite of repeated attacks by armed militants. The same church was the target of a previous attack in 1990 when Islamist extremists set it on fire, burning it almost to the ground.

"We understand that the latest attack was not directed only against us, Christians, but was also intended to embarrass the government and prove that *they [militants] still exist," Youssef said.* "We are aware that the government is very sensitive to three areas: security, tourism and Christians. Attacking any of the three attracts local and international attention. The authorities should respond as strongly as possible, so that the militants know that churches are not easy targets."

While the men sat silently in the church waiting to receive condolences, grieving women screamed and wept for the victims at their homes. Inside the home of Ayman Reda Guirgis, 21, who died hours after he was *taken to hospital, dozens of women, dressed* in mourning black, cried loudly and hit their own heads, a traditional sign of mourning. "Why, why did they do this? We don't hate them. Why kill innocent young people?" some shouted.

Guirgis had undergone two operations to remove bullets from his head, but they failed to save his life. According to his aunt, *who brought him up* following the death of his mother, Guirgis had gone to the church for confession, "but half an hour later, he was shot."



His older sister said: "A Muslim neighbour of mine told me a few days ago *that she feared that* something might happen during the *Eid El-Fitr* holiday but we didn't expect this... We cannot live in this place anymore.

"We raise our children, support them, dream for them and, in a second, a brutal, ignorant person ends their life with a cheap bullet."

For Elizabeth, the mother of 13-year-old Mina Michael Naguib, who was also killed, the attack signalled "the beginning of a new age of martyrs. They killed our young people because they are the only good thing in our lives. I am pleased to be the mother of a martyr."

The claim that security forces fail to guard Christians was rejected by Police Maj. Gen. Sami Abdel-Gawad, security chief for the governorate of Al-Minya, which is 240km south of Cairo. "Upper Egypt has the largest number of state security force *personnel, equipment, weapons and armoured ve*hicles in the entire country," he told the *Weekly*. "Both Muslims and Christians have been targeted, and it should be pointed out that a larger number of Muslims have been killed. Terrorism does not distinguish between Muslims and Christians."

The problem that faces the police, Abdel-Gawad said, is that most of the towns and villages of Upper Egypt — the hotbeds of terrorism — have narrow, *curving streets "which stops our armoured vehicles* from driving through."

Another obstacle is the many sugar cane fields in the region, which provide easy hiding places for the militants. According to Abdel-Gawad, 600 policemen and 45 armed checkpoints cover Abu Qurqas, "but it is not easy to raid the sugar cane fields surrounding the town. This is why it takes some time to arrest suspects who hide there, unless we burn and destroy all the fields. But if we did that, it would cause a national crisis."

Asked why no police guards were assigned to the church, Abdel-Gawad said this was in response to the request of church leaders themselves. He added, however, that a new plan currently under study calls for "assigning guards to all churches and Christian establishments, regardless of their approval or disapproval."

Defending National unity



photo: Abdel-Wahab El-Sehetti



photo: Sherif Sonbol

The Mufti, the Coptic bishop of Al-Minya, the Sheikh of Al-Azhar and minister of *al-awqaf* in an expression of national unity; earlier, condolences were offered in the same church where the victims fell

AS THE cabinet reviewed a report on the security situation, the nation's top Muslim clerics, led by Sheikh Al-Azhar, Mohamed Sayed Tantawi, visited Abu Qurqas on Monday in a gesture aimed at demonstrating that national unity will not be undermined by acts of terrorism.

The cabinet stressed that the security forces draw no distinction between Muslims and Christians, providing equal protection to both. Pre-emptive plans will continue to be enforced to abort possible attempts by militants to tarnish Egypt's image, the cabinet said.

In addition to Sheikh Tantawi, the delegation that visited Abu Qurqas included Hamdi Zaqzouq, Minister of *Al-Awqaf* (religious endowments), Sheikh Nasr Farid Wassel, the Mufti of the Republic, and Ahmed Omar Hashem, president of Al-Azhar University.

Zaqzouq, addressing a rally at the Mar Guirgis Church, delivered a speech on behalf of Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri.

In this speech, Ganzouri stressed that the government strongly condemns the attack on the church and that all religious institutions stand united in rejecting violence and calling for peace and security. "Islam is a religion of mercy and peace," Ganzouri said. "Anybody who commits aggression on the security of citizens has renounced religion. Security forces will be unrelenting in hunting down the terrorists. Treacherous bullets cannot undermine national unity."

Ganzouri said the delegation was offering condolences not only to Christians "but to all Muslim and Christian citizens because the tragedy befell all of Egypt."

In his speech, Sheikh Tantawi said that "the bonds of brotherhood and friendship which brought together Muslims and Christians for the past 14 centuries continue to be firm. There are no distinctions, on account of religion, between one citizen and another... Muslims and Christians have the same rights and duties. The lives and property of Christians have the same sanctity as the lives and property of Muslims... Muslims and Christians are in one boat. If it floats, all will survive, and if it sinks, all will drown."

Alluding to the terrorists, Tantawi said that "Islam is untainted by those who have renounced divine teachings. It is a big mistake to describe them as Muslims." He urged this "deviant clique to come back to their senses and return to the fold of God and the homeland."

Al-Azhar University's Hashem told the rally that the bullets of terrorism target the entire nation. He appealed to both Muslims and Christians to be alert to the schemes that aim at driving a wedge between them.

In response, Anba Arsanios, the Coptic bishop of Al-Minya, said that national unity will survive as long as there is life on Egyptian soil. He paid tribute to the "contribution" of Muslims who had donated blood to save the victims of the attack and to mosque preachers who used loudspeakers to urge Muslims to donate blood.

Now the 'Bosnian Arabs'?

Members of the Shura Council, debating the foreign dimensions of terrorism, pointed accusing fingers not only at Iran and Sudan but also Britain and the United States. **Gamal Essam El-Din** reports

Members of the Shura Council, debating a report released by the council's Arab, Foreign and National Security Committee, concluded that foreign elements continue to be involved in supporting domestic acts of terrorism, which aim to destabilise the country. The recent killing of 12 Copts in Abu Qurqas was also condemned, and linked to the continuing outside influence.

The 185-page report, entitled *The External Dimensions of the Phenomenon of Terrorism*, focuses on the role played by some foreign countries in fomenting terrorist activity in Egypt. The report warned of *the possibility of a new wave of terror*ism, launched by Arabs who had fought with the Muslim Bosnians in their war against the Serbs and now faced deportation from Bosnia.

Foreign Minister Amr Moussa told the council on *Monday that* the Abu Qurqas shootings "were aimed not only at sparking sectarian strife, but also at destabilising Egyptian society as a whole." He also alleged that a number of neighbouring countries, which he did not name, were involved in concerted efforts to undermine Egypt's national security.

Moussa made it clear he was referring to Sudan, telling the council: "The most serious example of this was the attempt on President Mubarak's life in the Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa in 1995." Egypt has repeatedly accused Sudan of providing shelter to the militants who carried out the assassination attempt and has demanded their extradition to face trial in Ethiopia.

Terrorism is a worldwide phenomenon, thriving on the "frustration and ignorance" prevailing in many societies, Moussa said, adding: "In the new world order, terrorism has topped the list of sub*jects discussed at UN conferences. Terrorism is* now an organised crime that threatens the stability of various nations, including the United States and Japan."

He pointed out that Egypt had participated actively in drafting eight UN agreements and protocols designed to fight various forms of terrorism, and expressed the hope that diplomacy would eventually succeed in organising an international conference with the objective of taking well-defined measures against international terrorism.

In the council on Sunday, Interior Minister Hassan El-Alfi presented a report on the measures taken by the security forces in the last two years to fight and pre-empt terrorist acts. These, he said, included providing security forces in Upper Egypt with well-trained combat personnel capable of attacking terrorists in mountains and cultivated areas. The Interior Ministry had also succeeded in curbing militant ideology, he said, pointing out that there had been 2,500 'repentants', detained militants who renounced violence and were subsequently freed, between 1994 and the present.

On the foreign dimensions of terrorism, El-Alfi said the ministry was closely monitoring the leaders of the Jihad and Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya organisations. He claimed that the leaders plan terrorist operations from a mosque in a European capital which he did not name. Through one of its embassies, the ministry was also keeping a close watch on Iran's "conspiratorial role" in supporting Islamist organisations and providing financial support to the Sudanese regime, which is controlled by the Sudanese National Islamic Front, the minister added.

In its war against these outside influences, the Interior Ministry has concluded bilateral security agreements with 17 countries in Africa, Asia and Europe, El-Alfi said.

Nazli Muawad, a member of the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP), agreed that the Abu Qurqas killings also had a foreign dimension. "This was evident in the fact that one of the assailants was known as Hassan Sarajevo," she said.

The report under debate warned that the security forces should be standing by ready to tackle terrorist operations of a new generation of "Bosnian Arabs", in the same way that they had foiled attacks by the Afghan Arabs.

"After the Bosnian problem was resolved by the Dayton agreement, most Bosnian Arabs are ex*pected to be deported from Bosnia," the report said.* "Security forces, therefore, should be ready to fight a new wave of terrorist acts similar to the one launched by the Afghan Arabs in *1992-1993*."

While the foreign and interior ministers were cautious in criticising unnamed foreign countries for supporting terrorism in Egypt, many council members, openly blamed the United States and Britain as well as Iran and Sudan. Mohamed Ragab, leader of the NDP majority, said that "following the Islamic revolution in Iran, the United States thought it should build bridges with fundamentalist trends in the region. The United States believed that this could secure it a role... in the region if the existing regimes fell. The US played this game with Egypt when it granted an entry visa to Omar Abdel-Rahman, but later it considered him a snake when he began to bite."

According to Ragab, Egypt, under Mohamed Ali at the start of the 19th century and more recently under Gamal Abdel-Nasser, has been targeted by world powers which have conspired to destroy its ambitious development plans and its role in the Arab world and the Middle East.

He also warned of an "ideological vacuum" among young people. "I emphasise that only six per cent of Egyptians belong to political parties, although young people below the age of 30 make up 60 per cent of the population," he said. Ragab called *for the establishment of an organisation for young* people, personally headed by President Mubarak, with the objective of mobilising Egypt's young people in *major* projects and providing them with a sound national awareness. He also called for a second "national dialogue" conference as a follow-up to the gathering held in July 1994.

Yunan Labib Rizk, a renowned historian, said the United States and Britain were always attempting to target Egypt's leading role in the Arab region. "Whenever Egypt's role becomes effective, either in supporting the Palestinian cause or Third World causes, it becomes the target of media campaigns that aim to destroy it," said Rizk. He praised the success of the Egyptian media in exposing the "reality" of a conference which Islamists had planned to hold in London last year, but later cancelled, as well as the "double standards" used by Britain.

Aisha Abdel-Hadi, NDP, also criticised Britain and other European countries for allegedly sponsoring and providing asylum to Egyptian and Arab terrorists.

Sarwat Abaza, the council's deputy speaker, squarely blamed the United States for granting nationality to a number of terrorists. "Countries which embraced terrorists, particularly the United States, now have their fingers burned," Abaza said.

Edited by **Wadie Kirolos**

Netanyahu's brand of peace education

Netanyahu's recent visit to Washington has manoeuvred the United States into putting the onus on the Arabs in the Middle East peace process. **Lamis Andoni** in Washington analyses the situation



photo: Reuters

When the Egyptian, Palestinian and Jordanian leaders arrive in Washington next month, on separate visits, they will probably find that the tone and stage for the future course of the Middle East peace process has already been set. In a brief visit to Washington last week, Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu successfully managed to throw the ball back into the Arab court. That did not prove to be a difficult task as it corresponded to the prevailing view in Washington.

In a nutshell, both US President Bill Clinton and Netanyahu have come to conclude that Israeli security interests and integration in the region are the two bases for peace in the Middle East. There was no reference, in public at least, to the Israeli occupation of Arab lands or to the continued building of Israeli settlements in the West Bank and the creeping annexation of East Jerusalem. In practice, this means that if Israel offers anything to Syria and Lebanon to break the stalemate, it will be mainly ideas on security measures and steps to normalise relations with Damascus and Beirut.

Netanyahu, who is said to have informed Clinton of a "creative formula" to break the deadlock with Syria, did not reveal the details but alluded to his ideas in a speech at the pro-Israeli Washington Institute for the Near East. Netanyahu plans to handle the negotiation process with Syria the same way he handled the process with the Palestinians — rearrange its order so that Israel security supersedes all other concerns. In a revealing remark, Netanyahu said that one of the biggest flaws of the Oslo Accords was that Israel vacated the West Bank and Gaza and relegated its security to the Palestinian Authority. The result, he concluded, was that Israel suffered, according to his figures, 220 deaths greater more than its casualties from Palestinian attacks over the preceding 10 years.

What is not clear is how Netanyahu is going to apply this approach to Syria and Lebanon as part of a negotiated deal. What is clear, though, is that he has Clinton's backing on the notion of the supremacy of Israeli security over other issues in the Arab-Israeli conflict. In a joint press conference with the American president, Clinton conceded that America does not support demands for an Israeli withdrawal from south Lebanon. "I believe it is imperative that Israel maintains the security of its northern borders," said Clinton when a journalist pointed out the contradiction between the US-declared support for Lebanon's territorial integrity and its abstention from backing an Israeli withdrawal from the south.

Netanyahu thanked the American president for his understanding that "peace is intertwined with security," describing Clinton as "an exceptional friend of Israel." The American emphasis on Israel's security is not exactly new. All American peace initiatives have had Israeli security on top of the agenda. However, what seems to be a new development is that Washington is endorsing Netanyahu's vision of a peace process almost solely based on Israel's security. Furthermore, by backing Netanyahu's slogan that peace is based on Israel's security, Washington gives the Israeli leader a free hand in marketing his hardline policies as a recipe for peace in the region.

By giving precedence to Israel's security as the goal of the peace process, Netanyahu blunted his declarations that Israel will continue to develop, confiscate land in Jerusalem and refuse to commit to withdrawal from the Golan Heights and south Lebanon. What came across in the American media, welcoming Netanyahu's transformation into a 'peace maker', was that he had signed a historic deal with the Palestinians and was ready to talk to Syria. Indeed, Netanyahu's statements about his future plans of blocking Palestinian sovereignty and keeping most of the West Bank under Israeli control were barely examined by the US media or the pundits who have shifted their focus of attention to the Arab countries' "failure to reciprocate".

In tune with the line that has been echoed by American officials and the media since the signing of the Hebron protocols, Netanyahu said that there is a need for "education for peace". The Israeli leader's "peace education", as he puts it, should be undertaken by Arab leaders whom he accused of not doing much to stem hostility against Israel among the Arab masses. The underlying theme that "hatred and bigotry" among the Arab masses are hindering peace has been the subject of much writing. Many American writers and newspapers have been essentially reflecting the American administration's frustration with the slow pace of normalisation between the Arab world and Israel.

Thus when Arab leaders, especially the Palestinians, arrive in Washington next month, they will be asked to deliver. As an editorial in*The New York Times* put it following the Hebron Protocols: "Where are Israel's Arab partners?"

The first dent in the wall?

David Kimche, the President of the Israeli Council on Foreign Relations and one of the main architects of the controversial Copenhagen Declaration, establishing an International Alliance for Arab-Israeli Peace (IAAIP), speaks to **Graham Usher**, in Jerusalem, of the background to the IAAIP, its future plans as well as his own personal involvement in the initiative

What were the origins of the Copenhagen Declaration and the IAAIP?
The idea was hatched around 18 months ago by Herbert Pundik, senior foreign correspondent with the Danish newspaper, *Politikan*.

Prior to Copenhagen, Israeli and Egyptian intellectuals had failed to meet in any public way. Egyptian intellectuals either refused to come to Israel or refused to host Israelis in Cairo. So Herbert had the idea of bringing them together in Copenhagen under the aegis of the Danish Foreign Ministry.

We held two preliminary sessions, in Copenhagen. The Egyptian side was led by Lutfi El-Kholi and included intellectuals like Mohamed Sid-Ahmed. I led the Israeli side, which included politicians such as the current Israeli Finance Minster Dan Meridor. The sessions were chaired by Herbert Pundik.

Then came the change of the Israeli government last May, followed by the stalemate over Hebron. The dialogue stopped. To revitalise it, Herbert and I travelled to Cairo and held long discussions with El-Kholi.

Out of these discussions, we decided to set up a non-governmental, people to people movement. We wanted to show the world and especially the peoples of the Middle East that there were many Israelis and Egyptians who supported the peace process. We set about organising the IAAIP. The Egyptians suggested that the Palestinians be invited. We suggested inviting the Jordanians. This is how the framework for the conference was established.

What are the IAAIP's future plans?
Our first step will be to present the Copenhagen Declaration to the three heads of state and the one head of territory of the four peoples involved in the conference — in other words, to President Mubarak, King Hussein, Israel's President Weizman and Chairman Arafat.

We intend to hold a general meeting in Israel along with articles in the press inviting people to join the alliance. One of our first specific projects is to organise cooperation between the mayors of Israeli, Egyptian, Jordanian and Palestinian municipalities. We will also establish panels and joint committees to monitor various aspects of the peace process.

Such endeavours are unique. They represent the first time the four peoples have engaged in joint activities of a non-governmental kind. And that is why the Egyptian opposition is howling. It is appalled by such developments. The IAAIP runs totally against their positions of no fraternisation with Israelis and no normalisation with Israel.

It represents a break in the cultural boycott...
Exactly. It represents the first dent in the wall of hostility that the Egyptian opposition, whether Nasserite or Islamist, has built to prevent activities of this sort from developing.

You describe the IAAIP as "non-governmental", as a "people to people" alliance. But who do you represent?
I represent all those Israelis who are determined to see the peace process advance. This covers a broad spectrum of Israeli opinion. It includes not only figures from the opposition, but also elements from within the ruling government coalition. For example, the IAAIP receives support from Roni Milo — the Likud mayor of Tel Aviv. One of the Israeli participants in Copenhagen was Maxim Levy, a Likud MK who is the brother of David Levy, Israel's current foreign minister. So you see the Israeli delegation to the Copenhagen conference is much wider than just the opposition parties.

But how can you separate yourself from your political history? You served for many years in Israel's Foreign Ministry and, before that, in Israel's intelligence services. How do you respond to Arab criticism that you are not a "non-governmental" Israeli intellectual?
My response is that if an ex-army or ex-intelligence person wants to meet with Arab intellectuals and talk peace, then that is every bit as important as if priests or rabbis do the same. In Copenhagen, one Jordanian delegation member was a former commander of the Jordanian Air Force. He said, "Look, I fought against you — I shot down one or two of your planes. But now I believe in peace". My sentiments are the same. I served my government for many years in various ways. But now I want to further the peace process.

I know the Egyptian intelligentsia have a paranoia over such matters. But the truth is that Israel's intelligence and security services mirror Israeli society. When you join the service, you are not asked about your political opinions. You are an Israeli. Some Israelis are right-wing and some are left-wing. And the majority, today, are in favour of the peace process. This is reflected in Israel's security and intelligence services. This may be difficult for the Egyptians to believe, but it's a fact.

In the Egyptian press, the Copenhagen Declaration has generated much discussion and a good deal of dissension. Yet in Israel there has been little press coverage and almost no dissension. How do you account for this?
There is a simple explanation. The conference was immediately followed by the helicopter crash in which 73 Israeli soldiers were killed. This dominated domestic Israeli news for a week. Our initiative was shunted aside. But I expect there will be a discussion inside Israel, especially after we present the declaration to President Weizman and go public.

Murder bounty tied with politics

Last week, an Iranian religious charity organisation increased the bounty on the head of British author Salman Rushdie. **Rasha Saad** reports on the implications inside and outside Iran

Last week, an Iranian religious charity organisation raised the reward for the murder of Salman Rushdie, a British writer of Indian origins. The religious Khordad-15 organisation raised the sum by $500,000 to a total of $2.5 million on the eve of the eighth anniversary of the death sentence. Iran's late spiritual leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini issued a *fatwa* (religious ruling) on 14 February 1989, sentencing Rushdie to death for allegedly insulting Islam in his novel *The Satanic Verses*. In addition, the religious foundation will pay interest accumulated on the standing reward since the time it was first offered.

According to Abdallah Hweis, an Iranian researcher in the history of Shi'ite doctrine at Bachoum University in Germany, the raising of the issue at this time has to do with domestic considerations, namely the Iranian elections. Hweis explained that the ayatollahs are trying to gather support for their candidate Nateq Nouri in his presidential campaign against the pragmatic current president, Hashemi Rafsanjani. "The ayatollahs want to prove that they are the legal heirs of Khomeini's teachings. They want to prove that they are up to the presidency and attract new votes," he explained.

Hweis also believes that the whole issue of Rushdie's book is exaggerated by the Iranian regime. From the beginning, Iran was not directly involved in the issue. It only engaged itself after Pakistanis staged a march in England against Rushdie's book. "Iran wants to prove that it is the leader and representative of the whole Islamic world. However, it is not that keen on Islam as there are books in Iran that are not pro-Islamic," Hweis said.

Iranian President Hashemi Rafsanjani tried to distance his government from the Khordad-15 organisation by stressing that it is a non-governmental organisation and its decisions have nothing to do with government policies. The organisation was created on Khomeini's orders for charity purposes, along with several other revolutionary organisations, after the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Although it is financed by private funds collected under religious pretenses, the organisation is run by people close to the regime. The organisation's head is a representative of paramount religious leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Additionally, Iran's elite Revolutionary Guards vowed to carry out the death sentence against Rushdie after the increase in the amount of the bounty. The Guards also vowed to confront anyone who seeks to "dilute the *fatwa*" and work to prevent it from being implemented.

The increase in the bounty for Rushdie's head indicates a split inside Iran. According to Hweis, President Rafsanjani only represents the government and hence cannot be concerned with *fatwas*. That is the duty of the religious hardliners. "Dividing power between Rafsanjani and the ayatollahs is a political game to escape criticism from the West. It also shows that Rafsanjani does not have absolute power in Iran," he said.

The increase in the bounty also muddles European-Iranian relations. Rafsanjani's attempts to distance himself from the issue were rejected by European officials who are concerned with Iran's human rights records. The British government called on Rafsanjani to condemn the bounty and to provide the EU with written assurances. A deputy of Chancellor Helmut Kohl's Christian Democrat Party said the increase in the price on Rushdie's head showed there were in Iran still "considerable forces" bent on having him killed.

When it was first issued in 1989, the *fatwa* caused an uproar in the West and friction in relations between Iran and Europe. After the death of Khomeini, Tehran stated that it cannot abrogate the *fatwa*, but that it will not send, encourage or assist anybody to kill Rushdie.

There are fears now that the increase in bounty will add to differences between Iran and Germany. Germany is Iran's top trading partner and has been the most zealous proponent of the European Union's "critical dialogue" with Iran, arguing, over Washington's objections, that it would be dangerous for regional stability to isolate the regime. Germany has also played intermediary between Israel and Iran for the repatriation of the remains of Israeli soldiers killed in Lebanon. However, Iranian-German relations became strained following accusations by a German federal prosecutor in November 1996 that Iran's spiritual leader Khamenei had ordered the assassination of four Iranian-Kurdish opposition figures in a Berlin restaurant in 1992. An Iranian and four Lebanese nationals have been on trial for the murders since 1993.

German prosecutors have also issued an arrest warrant for Tehran's Intelligence Minister Ali Fallahiyan and accused Iran of falsifying the truth in its attempt to discredit an Iranian witness. Iranians have protested this accusation and threatened to issue a Rushdie-style *fatwa* against the German prosecutor. Moreover, Bonn has asked Iran to respond to allegations that it detained and tortured Faraj Sarkuhi, an Iranian journalist-editor of the monthly *Adineh* (Friday) magazine, into admitting that he spied for Germany. It has also asked for details about the whereabouts of the journalist, whose wife and children live in Germany. According to a source who asked to remain anonymous, Sarkuhi used to have relations with a German diplomat in Iran, who helped an Iranian dissident, Abbas Maarouf, flee the country. Iran fears that the same will happen with Sarkuhi.

Fahmi Howeidi, an Egyptian Islamic writer, believes that the human rights issues came to the forefront as a way of pressuring Iran. He said that the US has already proposed to stop its criticism of the Iranian human rights record and drop its support of the United Arab Emirates in its dispute with Iran over three Gulf islands, if Iran agreed to stop its opposition to the Middle East peace process. However, Howeidi does not believe that the "critical dialogue" between Germany and Iran will end. Politics is a complicated game that changes according to interests and "as long as both Germany and Iran have mutual interests [i.e. economic interests], the critical dialogue cannot fade away," Howeidi said.

According to Hweis, Germany wants to keep the issue low key. In his view, however, Germany is in a difficult position. It has lost its allies in the Gulf, especially Iraq, and will find it difficult to sacrifice its relations with Iran. "Iran knows that Europe will not give up its relations with Iran that easily and hence exercises pressure on it," he said.

Up against paper swords

Gamal Nkrumah spoke to Abdel-Aziz Khalid, leader of the opposition Sudanese Alliance Forces, who is currently visiting Egypt

Sometimes the burden falls on the leader to take action. And the chairman of the Political-Military Bureau and commander-in-chief of the Sudanese Alliance Forces (SAF), Brigadier Abdel-Aziz Khalid, is one such leader. Khalid told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that Sudan is approaching the moment of truth concerning its political future. Khalid is visiting Cairo as part of an African, Arab and international tour to publicise the activities of his group, which has distinguished itself in the battlefields of eastern Sudan. The group works in conjunction with other opposition forces, including the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), headed by John Garang. The two groups recently coordinated military action against government forces in Blue Nile Province.

Garang is head of the Joint Military Command (JMC) of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) — the umbrella grouping of Sudanese opposition forces. Khalid's group is also a member of the NDA, but he stresses SAF's independence from the traditional northern political parties such as the Umma Party and the Democratic Unionist Party — the two parties that dominate the NDA.

Khalid was a high-ranking officer in the Sudanese army, and was among the senior officers who were rounded up and imprisoned by the National Islamic Front (NIF) and the government of Sudanese President Omar Hassan Al-Bashir. He escaped from Sudan, taking the northern route to Egypt. He slipped past border guards stationed at the Egyptian-Sudanese frontier and lived in exile in Egypt for a couple of years before moving to Eritrea to form SAF and "get closer to the scene of action."

Eritrea offered full political backing to the Sudanese opposition. SAF seized the moment. "SAF engages in classical guerrilla warfare. We use weapons that are easy to carry — light arms. Our men are armed with Klashnikovs; Western, Russian and Chinese-made machine guns and hand grenades; RPG anti-tank missiles and German G3 mortars. The government forces were taken by surprise and they were indisputably beaten. Their fighting capability is weak, their morale low," Khalid said.

Caution was thrown to the wind and the Sudanese government committed most of its troops to the southern and eastern border frontlines. From Damazin to Khartoum, there are no government forces — except for a few soldiers in Sennar. Khartoum faced a humiliating setback last week when it was forced to eat its own words and concede that the Sudanese opposition forces, and not the Eritreans and Ethiopians as was previously claimed, scored the victories in Menza, Kurmuk and Horemshokeb.

Khalid said that Iran recently supplied Khartoum with weapons, ammunition, and spare parts as well as pilots and 25 technical experts. He added that Qatar, too, was supplying the government with arms and ammunition in cooperation with Iran. There is increased activity at the government's Wadi Sayedna military base near Omdurman on the outskirts of the Sudanese capital Khartoum.

SAF's first military strike against the government forces took place in April 1996 in the vicinity of the provincial capital of Kassala in eastern Sudan. A vast tract of territory, near Togan north of Kassala, was declared a liberated zone. In October and November 1996, the first joint military operation against government forces took place. SAF coordinated military activities with the Beja Congress which was active in the Red Sea area and the northern section of the Sudanese-Eritrean border. SAF's focus of activity was the southern section of the Eritrean-Sudanese border.

"SAF, SPLA, and Beja Congress cooperate and coordinate their military actions under the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) banner," Khalid explained. "The traditional parties, like the Umma Party have not been very active militarily. However, they are currently training their men."

"On 12 January 1997, we launched an operation in Blue Nile, in a place called Menza. It was one of our most successful strikes," Khalid mused. Menza marked a turning point. SAF became a fighting machine poised to overrun Khartoum. Menza could be made a metaphor for the torpor and international isolation that overtook Khartoum. "The NIF militias and government forces depend completely on support coming from Iran, Iraq and Libya — either directly or through arms purchased by these states from China and former Soviet bloc countries such as Bulgaria. Recently, Russia has increased its arms shipments to Sudan," Khalid said.

Consumed by a religious hubris, the NIF militiamen are now discovering to their loss the vulnerability of religious fervour and jingoistic rhetoric against the lightly armed SAF infantry. The NIF is not popular with the masses.

Why did the SAF stop short of taking Damazin and Roseiries? "It was a tactical decision. It was not a military decision. It was a question of politics. We wanted to intensify political work among the people of the southern Blue Nile. The people wanted to know who the invader was and why the invader was carrying guns," Khalid said. "We had to explain that we were not invaders. We had to prove that we were liberators — freedom fighters. We waited in vain for a NIF counter-attack. The government troops were demoralised and they refused to be drawn into battle."

But what about the reports of rape and abuse by SAF against innocent civilians? "The reports were false — government propaganda. We had a very warm welcome. The people were impressed with the well-disciplined SAF troops. We explained that we were freedom fighters and not marauderers. The NIF couldn't mobilise the masses. Their lack of organisation in the outlying rural areas, like Blue Nile, exposed their inherent weakness.

"We found a single school with four teachers. The school was composed of 10 huts. The teachers were not paid a salary — their salaries were appropriated by the so-called Popular Defense Forces (PDFs) and the food crops the peasants produced were confiscated. We stopped officials from collecting *zakat* [a 2.5 per cent religious tax on income ordained by Islam] and so we were welcomed. The people of the area are ethnic Funj — they are members of the Kadaru tribe, a major branch of the Funj people. In the NIF barracks we discovered discarded *marissa* — the traditional beer brewed from sorghum. They force the people to pay *zakat* — but the poor and hungry peasants are not supposed to pay *zakat*. Islam forbids such practices. There is no *ikrah* [compulsion] in religion, Islam teaches. So we banned the enforced *zakat* and the peasants were jubilant," Khalid said.

According to Khalid, the NIF poses a grave threat to the secular and democratic governments of the region: "The NIF has dangerous connections with the Libyan Islamist forces, the Eritrean Islamic Jihad Organisation and Oromo Islamists, Kenyan Islamists and Somalia's Hussein Farah Aidid. The Islamic Call Organisation (ICO), with the help of the Sudanese Bank of Agriculture, is active in some neighbouring African countries including Chad. They propagate Islamist ideology."

هكذا من الأصل

Fascism to the rescue

Does the success of the racist National Front mean a dramatic recentering of French political life to the right? **Hosny Abdel-Rehim** follows the developments in France while **Faiza Rady** in Cairo analyses the situation in the wake of the latest FN electoral success

Last Friday, an impressive delegation of well-known French writers, artists, physicians and psychiatrists boarded a "freedom train" going from Paris to Châteauvallon, a suburb of Toulon. They were protesting the threatened closure of Châteauvallon's National Dance and Image Theatre and the sacking of its founding director, Gérard Paquet. Responding to a motion presented by Toulon's radical right-wing mayor, National Front (FN) member Jean-Marie Le Chevallier, the city's Supreme Court examined the motion for closure and postponed judgement until 20 March.

The growing movement of intellectuals against the FN is led by film actors and directors. Besides supporting Paquet, they have also protested against a four-year government crack-down on illegal immigrants and a recent bill requiring French citizens to report the arrival and departure of foreigners staying in their homes.

"After the 4 February court judgement finding Ms Jacqueline Dellombe guilty of letting an illegal Zairian immigrant friend stay at her home, we call upon our fellow citizens to disobey and not submit to these inhuman laws," the movie directors said. In their statement, the "Manifesto of the 66", they asserted: "We are guilty, every one of us, of putting up illegal foreign residents recently. We request being probed and put on trial."

Fifty-eight physics experts also signed a petition against the bill on the Internet. Seven hundred psychoanalysts and more than 100 lawyers followed suit, signing appeals similar to the manifesto. On Monday, some 50 artists and cartoonists published drawings against the bill in the left-leaning daily *Libération*. "We have to act, although this should be the job of our political parties," said prominent film director Bernard Tavernier.

Jean-Luc Mélenchon from the Senate Socialist Group was quick to reply, "the reaction of the movie directors is healthy, but insufficient. We haven't witnessed anything comparable since Pétain [president of the collaborationist Vichy government during the Nazi occupation]. The entire file [of immigration laws] should be scrapped and started from scratch. We have to come up with a humanitarian law that assures foreigners a decent life."

The right to a decent life is all Vong Souk Kham, a young Laotian woman, is asking for. Along with 13 other illegal immigrants in the northern city of Lille, she has been on a hunger strike for more than 30 days. Resting on a mattress in the House of Nature and Environment, Kham does not speak to visitors. Instead she points to a wall poster that tells her story. "This is my second hunger strike. In 1990, the war in Laos killed both my parents and made me homeless. From Paris to Lille, the road has been long: hard clandestine work; a lawyer who took most of my money in exchange for empty promises. Mr Prefect, all I want is to be here legally and get a residence permit."

In view of the fascist-leaning FN's recent victory in the municipal elections of Vitrolles, a bleak and depressed small town near Marseilles, immigrants may face even more hardship in times to come. The Front's official policy is to deport France's illegal immigrants, many of them fathers and spouses of French citizens, and revoke the nationality of those who have been naturalised. The reason for such policy is simple. Like the Nazis of old, the FN blames the foreigners for every social ill under the sun. "Today immigration, unemployment and AIDS pose a real threat to the liberty and security of the French people and to the very security of France. The National Front sees itself as the stronghold and bastion of national identity against cosmopolitan projects aimed at mixing people and cultures," reads their platform.


African illegal immigrants waiting for a court decision on a pending expulsion order. Most of them expect to be sent back *(photo: AP)*

Since 1995, the FN has won three other municipal elections and controls Marignane, Orange and Toulon in southern France. Last spring, the FN-controlled city hall of Orange became notorious for its "cultural cleansing" of the municipal library. In April, some books deemed too "cosmopolitan" by the fascist administration disappeared. Some of these books were children's fairy tales from Africa, South America, China and Haiti. "Ideologically incorrect" literature such as books about World War II, racism and rap-music also vanished into thin air.

Alarmed about the public outcry following this "cleansing" act, the minister of culture, Philippe Douste-Blazy, ordered an investigation. All missing books were returned to the shelves, with the exception of the offensive fairy tales. Meanwhile, the FN changed its tactics. It supplemented the library with ideologically more suitable material like *Fascism Viewed from the Right*, penned by the Italian Nazi-supporter Julius Evolar and *Death in Singing* by Joseph Darnand, founder of the murderous Vichy militia.

In Vitrolles, Catherine Megret replaced her disqualified husband Bruno — the number two man in the FN — and became mayor with 52 per cent of the vote against outgoing socialist mayor Jean-Jacques Anglade's 48 per cent. The campaign was, according to all accounts, impeccably run by the Front, although the upper class, Oxford-educated Megret committed some minor political blunders such as occasionally sticking out her tongue at the opposition or publicly calling a blond opponent a "traitor to her race."

Many political analysts believe that the latest FN victory is especially significant although the right and the left joined forces to prevent it. Roger Guichard of the centre-right l'Union pour la Démocratie Française (UDF), at the prompting of Prime Minister Alain Juppé, pulled out of the second round in an attempt to unite the anti-Front vote. It was hoped that given the choice between the FN and the Socialists, UDF sympathisers would choose the Socialists by default.

Despite the parties' strategising, the Front managed to capture Vitrolles with a majority. After the victory, FN leader Jean-Marie Le Pen boasted to a jubilant crowd of followers, "Who can say the Front National is not capable of becoming the leading political party in France?"

Members of Prime Minister Alain Juppé's conservative coalition tried to dismiss the Front's victory as an aberration. "You have to put this in its proper perspective," said Social Affairs Minister Jacques Barrot, "this was a very particular situation." Barrot was referring to Vitrolles' higher-than-average 22 per cent unemployment rate and heavy immigrant population, making the city an easy target for the FN.

Like the historical German and Italian brands of fascism, FN ideology exploits the working class' deep fear of losing its hard-earned livelihood during periods of recession. Le Pen successfully manipulates this anxiety by accusing alien Arabs and Africans of causing unemployment by flooding the labour market and usurping jobs that should rightfully go to the French.

Yet, Urban Affairs Minister Eric Raoult believes that the Front's victory was due less to Le Pen's promises to expel immigrants than to the constant compromises made by the mainstream parties, sliding in the direction of the FN and making its message more acceptable. "On unemployment and immigration, the left should come back to the left and the right should have no shame to be itself," he said.

Political analyst Louis Ryan agrees. He believes that both the right and the left lean towards and often adopt the Front's position on immigration. Examples abound. While the FN promises mass expulsions of Arabs and Africans and the retrospective revoking of French nationality, former Socialist Prime Minister Edith Cresson warned that she would hire charter planes for mass deportations. Like Le Pen, former President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing stands on record for saying that nationality should be conferred not by birth, but by "blood". The FN wants to ban the building of mosques and control the teaching of Islam. Kofi Yamgname, the former black Socialist Minister for Integration, told Muslims that they must restrict Islamic teaching and give up traditional scarves for school girls. Those who do not do as they are told "should go back home", added the minister.

With such blurred political positions and a unified stand on immigrants, parties of both the right and the left have created a public acceptance of racism. In the words of activist Pierre Aulax "racism is now admissible, it has been rationalised." If this is true, then Le Pen may soon rightfully claim his place as the leader of the political centre.

Hell's angels

Gamal Nkrumah spoke to *Emma Bonino, the daredevil* diplomat who "came back from hell"

European Union Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid, Italian-born Emma Bonino, recently returned to Brussels after a four-day tour of the Great Lakes region of Africa. How did she react to the brutal reality of Africa's Great Lakes region? "I came back from hell," Bonino told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

"I have met people who [supposedly] don't exist," Bonino said, referring to the Rwandan Hutu refugees who were presumed to have returned home. "There are thousands of Hutu refugees still kept by force in eastern Zaire. They are caught up in the violence. The humanitarian conditions in the refugee camps of eastern Zaire are deplorable. Tingi-Tingi is like hell," Bonino said. "Access to the Tingi-Tingi camp is extremely difficult," Bonino added. Bonino explained that the Hutu militias have barricaded themselves inside the camp and are using innocent refugees as human shields.

In the Zairean capital Kinshasa, opposition leader Etienne Tshisekedi called on Zairean President Mobutu Sese Seku to negotiate an end to the civil war in eastern Zaire with the leader of the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire, Laurent-Désiré Kabila. Mobutu turned down Tshisekedi's plea. Instead, the Zairean president retired to his favourite hideout, his hometown of Gbadolite. Once again, Mobutu seems satisfied to run his country by remote control.

Meanwhile, regional and international organisations are stepping up efforts to resolve the crisis. Zaire's neighbours are concerned about a spillover of the violence into their own territories and the aid donors are at a complete loss as to how to stop the fighting. United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan, too, is much distressed by the situation in eastern Zaire. Annan dispatched several top level officials to the war-torn region. Special representative of the UN and the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) to the Great Lakes region, Mohamed Sahnoun, went to see Mobutu in Gbadolite. Annan himself met with several key European donor nations. Germany and Norway financially support Sahnoun's mission. Following close on the heels of Bonino, UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Sadako Ogata also toured the war-ravaged Great Lakes region. Ogata described Tingi-Tingi as a hotbed of Hutu militias.

In New York, Annan met with Ugandan President Yoweri Musevéni on Saturday. He also held talks with the UN Security Council president, Ambassador of Kenya Njuguna Mahugu. The Rwandan ethnic Hutu opposition, the Rally for the Return of Refugees and Democracy in Rwanda (RDR), is headquartered in the Kenyan capital Nairobi. The RDR accuses UNHCR and the Zairean opposition forces of spreading lies about the situation in the eastern Zairean refugee camps. The RDR, which is fighting against the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) in power in Rwanda, warned that, "This current campaign of lies is aimed at preparing international opinion psychologically and giving the green light to the combined forces of the RPF and its agents [Kabila's forces] to launch a final offensive on the Tingi-Tingi camp."

Annan expressed concern about reports of the militarisation of the Tingi-Tingi camp. Tingi-Tingi hosts some 150,000 Rwandan refugees, mostly women and children. The tense situation puts at risk the lives of thousands of children in the encampment. Annan appealed to the warring parties to stop turning refugee camps into armed bases. He stressed that the security of the refugees and humanitarian workers is paramount. "Former Rwandan soldiers and militia in the settlement are receiving weapons, ammunition and uniforms by air and are being sent to the front-line. Military elements are being deployed in positions near the camps and sections of the encampment are being used as storage facilities for arms and ammunitions. Young male refugees are being recruited," Fred Eckhard, Annan's spokesman, told the *Weekly*. Annan asked the protagonists to "stop turning the Tingi-Tingi camp into an armed base and to ensure the safety and security of all refugees and humanitarian personnel."

Kabila's forces, now in control of much of eastern Zaire, are moving westwards. Kisangani, a metropolis of two million people, is Zaire's third largest city and the headquarters of the Zairean army's operations against the armed opposition forces in eastern Zaire. Kisangani is the economic capital and transportation hub of northeastern Zaire and capital of Haute Zaire province. Kabila's forces are rapidly advancing on Kisangani and the ill-equipped and badly trained Zairean army troops, together with their Hutu militiamen allies, are fleeing before Kabila's men. This week, General Kpama Baramoto Kata, the commander of President Mobutu Sese Seku's Civil Guard disclosed that thousands of Zairean men are being trained with assistance from France, Belgium and China.

"Perhaps, in retrospect, the multinational force should not have been disbanded. It should have been suspended in order to be reactivated. Whether that would have been possible or not is difficult to say, but to create a multinational force you need to have a coalition of the willing and the will. In the absence of the willing and the will, there is very little the UN can do in terms of putting in a force," Annan told reporters in New York over the weekend.

"At this rate we are focusing on a political settlement. One of the things Sahnoun is expected to do, with the support of the governments in the region, is to try and seek a cease-fire and perhaps try to get them to the [negotiating] table. Once they are at the table and we begin to talk, we would hope that we will be able to convince all parties in Zaire to accept participation in the election as the ultimate solution of their differences," Annan added.

What is the single most important result of your mission? Did you achieve anything?

After the massive return to Rwanda of Hutu refugees coming from Zaire and Tanzania, and after the decision of the multilateral force to disband before it even started its mission, some people thought that the crisis in the Great Lakes region was more or less over. Some even went as far as ridiculing those who, like me, were worried about the fate of several hundreds of thousands of refugees — not to mention Zairians who were and still are fleeing violence — lost in the bush, without any humanitarian assistance.

At the beginning of February, I went to Zaire — somewhere between Kisangani and Lubutu — to visit these people who allegedly did not exist. These are people whom the generals of the most powerful armies in the world could not or would not find with their radar, people who were out of sight, and out of mind for most of the rest of the world. I have seen these people, and I can state categorically that in November and December, someone was trying to mislead us when they said there was no problem. I believe I have contributed to putting the crisis in the Great Lakes region back on the international agenda, at least as far as its humanitarian aspects are concerned.

Why did you describe the area as hell?

The camp at Tingi-Tingi, where most of the 200,000 refugees from Lubutu are at the moment, is nothing more than a clearing in the forest. It's hot — 35 degrees — there's hardly any water or food. Between 30 and 40 people, half of them children, die of hunger every day. If that's not hell, I don't know what is.

Why do you think that an international force is necessary to keep the peace in the area?

I am not qualified to draw up a plan for military intervention and besides, I'm aware that no-one wants to send soldiers to Zaire. All the same, to guarantee minimal humanitarian aid for all these people — about 200,000 around Lubutu, plus about 300,000 others whose whereabouts we don't know, plus an unknown number of displaced Zairians — there has to be military backing for security to make sure aid gets to where it is needed.

I do not know if Mr Kabila can win the war, and I don't really know what he represents. But I do know that humanitarian aid agencies do not have any access to areas under Mr Kabila's control.

You said that you saw some mercenaries?

I arrived at Kisangani airport at the same time as some mercenaries, and there were some staying at the hotel at which I stayed. They made no pretense of being anything other than mercenaries. That is all I can tell you about them.

A lot of arms are shipped from Europe to the warring factions. Can this deathly trade be stopped?

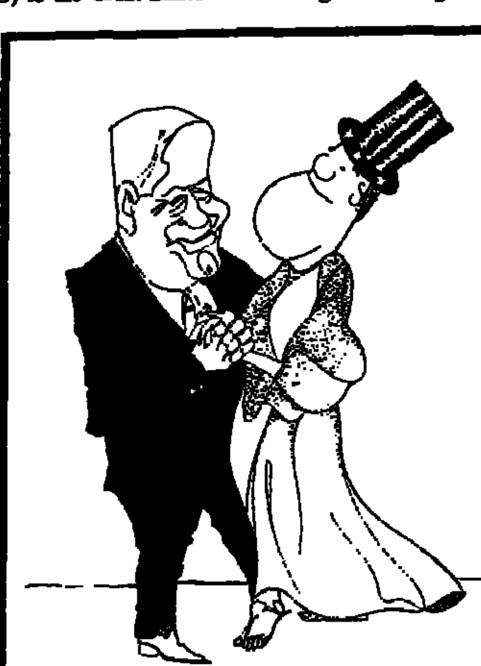
There is still an embargo as regards Zaire. Rwanda, which is no stranger to this war, also faced an embargo until last summer. All one can say about the situation is that the international community does not have efficient instruments to stop the arms trade at the right time, in the right place.

How do the European Union and American perceptions of the crisis in the Great lakes region differ?

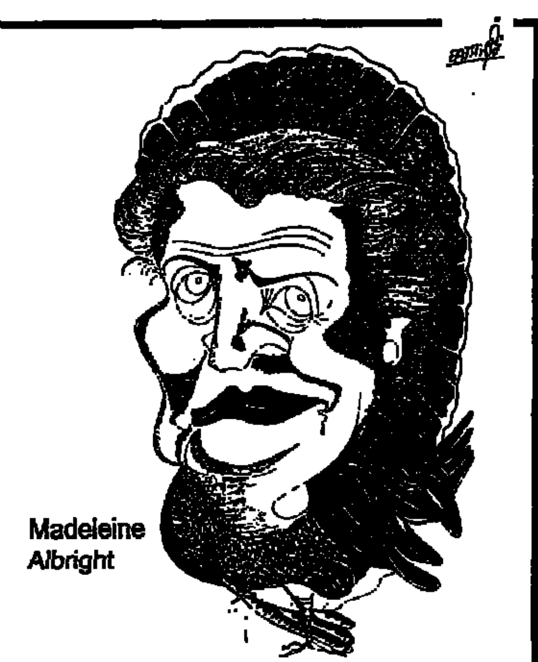
The 15 countries of the European Union committed themselves last October, together with the United Nations, to financing the last stage of the transition to democracy in Zaire: the electoral process. France and Belgium, whatever their vested interests in the region, support that process entirely. Whatever you may think of the policy, the decision was made in a transparent manner and openly announced.

The countries that contributed to the armed rebellion in Kivu, and those that supported it to any extent, probably have a different agenda for Zaire. Do they believe the overthrow of Mobutu to be more important than the holding of elections? They may be right. But they are not exactly transparent in their policy-making and implementation.

It took a declaration from the US State Department to bring out into the open what everyone knew; that there are foreign troops in Zaire. What are their aims in this way? No-one has proposed to the European Union or to any of its member states an alternative to [free and fair] elections, the strategy agreed with the UN in 1996.







Winter of discontent

Jooneed Khan reflects on the tough winter in the Balkans

Even though the US is concerned for its 20,000 GIs, the Balkan winter will not hit so hard the 60,000 men of the international peace-keeping force in Bosnia-Herzegovina. They have a job, they are armed and fed regularly by sea and airlifts. However, the winter of 1997 is tough for the millions of Serbs, Albanians and Bulgarians faced with unemployment, famine and despair. They are caught up in the second round of post-Cold War struggles in that critical region.

The first round witnessed bloody Serbo-Croat tribal warfare in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Global strategic interests involving Russia, Europe, the US and the Muslim world were at stake. So much so that the Bosnians, who were committed to a non-tribal, pluralistic society, found themselves defined as a tribe, the "Muslims", and cornered into their own "ethnic homeland".

The present wind blowing over Belgrade, Sofia and Tirana demands a justice repressed too long under the mirages of Titoism and Stalinism. But 90 successive days of demonstrations in Belgrade can become tiresome.

History was made last week in Belgrade when the Serbian parliament, dominated by the former communists, finally recognised the opposition's victories in the 17 November municipal elections. Slobodan Milosevic could not continue deflecting Serbian anger towards the war in Bosnia. He gave up 14 municipalities, including the capital itself, bowing to the opposition's determination and the vigilance of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

The economic dimension of the Serbian crisis has remained in the shadows, except on two occasions. Once, workers chose to keep the factories running instead of joining the students and, the other time, Montenegro legislators accused the Serbian president of hurting the interests of the new Yugoslavia. In Bulgaria and Albania, however, poverty cannot be glossed over. It was obvious last week in the angry revolt of the dispossessed in Vlora.

In Bulgaria, where "decommunisation" is as unfinished as in Serbia, the former communists who quit the government in December and the democrats who elected Petar Stoianov as president have finally agreed to hold early legislative elections in April. Until then, the interim government will be running a "financial task force" tied to the familiar demands of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund — closure or privatisation of state enterprises, budgetary cutbacks, linkage of the lev to a strong convertible currency.

The lev has fallen from 500 to the US dollar in January to 2,600 last week and prices went up by 134 per cent over the first 11 days of February alone. Also, Bulgaria must pay nearly $1 billion to foreign creditors this year. The Albanian experience, however, shows that political "decommunisation" is not enough and that a country can go from communist chaos to capitalist chaos overnight. The present crisis was triggered by a series of criminal bankruptcies of pyramidal companies that caused the ruin of hundreds of thousands of small investors lured by promises of huge profits.

In Albania, the government has chosen appeasement after threatening to impose a state of emergency in defence of "constitutional order" after three people died and more than 150 were injured in demonstrations in the port city of Vlora. Former communists, thrown into the opposition Forum for Democracy with nine other parties, are now demanding the resignation of the government and the organisation of early legislative elections.

The opposition got a boost from an unlikely quarter last week. The British media, including *The Economist* and *The Independent*, ran a series of hard-hitting articles calling Berisha "authoritarian" and "over-mighty". They described last summer's poll for Parliament as "too dirty" and called Berisha's regime a "one-party state." *The Independent*, citing Western intelligence reports, further accused the government of being behind the shady pyramid investment schemes that have ruined so many people. They allege that Berisha's ruling Democratic Party received heavy funding from them and indict him for running a "gangster state" that contravened sanctions during the war by selling oil to Serbia and Montenegro. They also accuse the government of being involved in drug and gun trafficking in association with gangsters in Kosovo and various Italian mafias.

Things are hardly better in the rest of the Balkans. Romania is relatively calm but it, too, faces a Bulgarian-type predicament. The Ieu, which was pegged at 1,000 to the US dollar in 1993 has now fallen to more than 6,000 to the dollar. The government is backtracking on its election promise of income tax cuts, citing an "unexpected rise in unemployment as a result of the closing or privatisation of non-productive state enterprises." Judges protesting low wages have boycotted court sessions and trade unions warn that they are losing patience.

Romania has improved relations with Hungary after settling the hot issue of the status of its Hungarian minority. However, it is now waving its own "tribal card" in discussions aimed at forming a "triangular" grouping with Poland and Ukraine. Bucharest is demanding the recognition of Council of Europe Resolution 1201 on the protection of Ukraine's Romanian minority.

The biggest tribal threats in the Balkans remain those of Bosnia and Croatia. Serbs of the Republika Srpska (RS), the Bosnian-Serbian political entity, have attacked Muslims who were rebuilding their homes in the village of Gajeca. Croats have assaulted Muslims from East Mostar who were visiting Muslim graveyards in the Western part of the city on the occasion of *Eid Al-Fitr*, killing a 65-year-old man.

Worse still, the International Arbitration Commission (IAC) set up under the Dayton Agreement has failed to resolve the fate of the strategic town of Brcko. A major transportation hub in northern Bosnia which both the Bosnians and Croatians want to control, Brcko was conquered and "ethnically purified" by the Serbs in 1992. The Serbs desperately need to control Brcko to link up the two portions of the RS. Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic has said he will resign if Brcko goes to the Serbs and the two threaten to go to war over it. The IAC has put off a decision for another year, in a move that should not displease Milosevic.

As the 15 July deadline for the return of Eastern Slavonia to Croatian authority nears, Serbs have begun agitating again for a special status for the territory. They want open borders with Serbia and a joint Croatian and Yugoslav citizenship. Local elections due to be held in mid-April have been postponed to mid-May by the UN.

There are still ample opportunities for Milosevic to escape from reality by using the tribal card. Besides, the Serbian opposition will not find it easy to run the municipal governments it has acquired. It will have to depend on funding and patronage from the central government and the latter will certainly manoeuvre tightly in the run-up to the forthcoming Serbian elections.

***Al-Ahram Weekly* continues to focus on employment opportunities provided by medium and micro-enterprise schemes, the problems they face, and possible solutions**

The culture of enterprise

Nagla Mortagy writes on micro-enterprise development and the strengthening of the entrepreneurial spirit

With government policy bent on guaranteeing employment for graduates, there are attempts to modify training and education systems with the aim of providing the labour market with the necessary skills, attitudes and conduct required by the business community.

In line with this new wave of capitalism and entrepreneurialism, changes need to be made in the educational, training, cultural, investment and money market systems. These reforms will lead to an atmosphere conducive to the development of large, medium and small private businesses. In turn, many current problems, such as unemployment, will decrease. I will, therefore, try to suggest a model for the empowerment of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Egypt, the implementation of which can be accomplished through the unified efforts of the Egyptian government and the European Community.

Many researchers and scientists have proven that entrepreneurialism is, internationally, the engine of economic progress, and that reinforcing the entrepreneurial spirit provides people with the means to secure their livelihood rather than remain dependent on the charity of others.

Egypt, as a developing country, realises that its SMEs cannot grow, expand or develop in the current economic climate — an environment which leaves SMEs at the mercy of market forces. Given this increasingly competitive and transitional economic climate, policy reforms are a necessary component of micro-enterprise growth and promotion. Unfortunately, Egypt has not formally launched such a policy that would lead to the rapid development of a 'culture of enterprise' among the country's budding entrepreneurs.

Moreover, recent efforts to bolster this entrepreneurial spirit have fallen short of their target for a number of reasons. First, these efforts have been undertaken independently and, therefore, resulted in duplication, a loss of money and time. Second, policies designed to promote and advance technical and professional training, upgrading technology or addressing the issue of adequate marketing mechanisms, are all yet to be developed or implemented. To tackle these issues, an organisation, designed to develop and promote cooperation and coordination between the many bodies involved in SME development, must be established. Such an organisation would serve as an effective channel of communication between SMEs and the government, as well as being responsible for the modernisation of equipment and facilities used by SMEs.

Similarly, it would also be charged with generating demand for the products and services of SMEs, securing fair opportunities for businesses and improving the relationship between labour and management.

In other reform initiatives, onerous bureaucratic regulations should be minimised as a way of encouraging the establishment of new businesses and expanding the range and scope of those already in operation. To cut through this red tape, the same model currently being used in the UK — the "one-shop show" — could be implemented in Egypt. Under this system, all such procedures are handled by one body rather than having the tasks distributed among various government offices.

One of the major constraints reported by many entrepreneurs is the need to devise a means by which SMEs can develop their markets. The afore-mentioned organisation would be instrumental in this task, ensuring that relevant information is made public on the domestic, regional and international levels. As the situation stands now, there is little available information on SMEs in Egypt. The severity of this problem is illustrated by the fact that most entrepreneurs have no reliable channels through which to access information. The overwhelming majority of small businesses are forced to operate in an informational vacuum. Therefore, assisting SMEs to promote and sell their goods in relevant markets, as well as helping them secure a foot-hold as feeder industries for larger enterprises, is an important step in promoting the growth and development of these micro-enterprises.

While these reforms are necessary for improving the situation of SMEs that are already operational, the first and perhaps most important step comes in the form of making the culture of enterprise an integral part of the educational system. As it now stands, the educational system is geared towards producing loyal civil servants rather than skilled entrepreneurs. But targeting these reforms at the school and university level, young graduates will be better equipped to deal with the demands of self-sufficiency and setting up their own businesses.

To this end, Helwan University has become the first Egyptian university to set up such a programme. Known as the Small and Medium Business Centre, this body seeks to train, encourage and support students in their bid to set up their own businesses.

The writer is a professor of Human Resource Management and Development at Helwan University.

Bank boosts small business

A pioneer project through the National Development Bank offers small producers and businessmen a leg up, reports **Zeinab Abul-Gheit**

Any questions concerning the National Development Bank's (NDB) small and micro-enterprise (SME) loan programme would probably be best referred to Ali El-Guindi, a young agricultural engineer. While not quite a rags-to-riches story, El-Guindi has a good deal to smile about.

After graduating in 1991, he, like thousands of other graduates, could not find suitable employment. The solution, in El-Guindi's eyes, was to start his own business. Through a loan from the NDB, he set up an underwear factory. And, in just a couple of years, the agricultural engineer has managed to raise the productive capacity of his factory by 40 per cent, purchase additional equipment, increase the number of employees working for him from 20 to 40 and, last but not least, increase his capital by 100 per cent.

El-Guindi's success, says Abdel-Fattah Sayed, director of the NDB's Small Enterprise Project (SEP), has been repeated in numerous other cases by young entrepreneurs who signed up under this project. The main aim of the SEP, explained Sayed, is to promote small industry development and increase the sources and availability of credit and banking facilities for owners of SMEs.

Under the guidelines of the project, the NDB stipulates that the borrower should be engaged in a commercial, industrial or investment activity employing fewer than 15 people and have assets, excluding land and buildings, not exceeding LE25,000.

Before the loan is approved, a loan officer is appointed by the bank to run a credit check on the borrower. Once approved, clients must then place 10 per cent of the requested amount of the loan into an NDB interest-bearing savings account. The loans, which range from LE250 to LE10,000, bear an interest rate of 15 per cent and are issued for a period of 4 to 12 months.

But the bank's interest in the SME does not stop only at recouping its principal. It also provides technical assistance to producers and helps them market their products by putting them in touch with customers.

"The relationship between the researcher and the clients is the main reason behind the success of the project," stated Sayed.

With this, Sanaa Nabil would agree. Nabil, who took out such a loan from the NDB, used the money to open a lingerie shop. "I used the loans to pay for the goods in cash and get a discount," she said. "Earlier, I had paid for the goods in instalments and, as a result, had to pay additional interest."



A poultry breeding farm made possible by an NDB loan

photo: Ayman Ibrahim

The NDB's programme has, over the past years, been quite successful. The bank, explained Ahmed Ismail, director of the NDB's Garden City branch office, started in 1988 by financing small businesses in the Sharqiya and Damietta governorates, through grants offered by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Then, through an additional grant from the Ford Foundation, the project was expanded to include the Minya Governorate. The success of these experiments prompted USAID to provide other financing for similar projects in Greater Cairo, Giza and Qalyubiya.

These grants, which have resulted in the launching of projects in seven governorates through 20 branches of the NDB, total over LE51 million, of which the bank has contributed over LE12 million. According to Ismail, the projects are now being self-financed, and the repayment rate has reached 96 per cent.

In 1989, Sayed Abu Laban was the first person in the village of El-Aas to obtain a loan from the NDB. With a very modest loan of LE250, Abu Laban went into the poultry breeding business. Now, several years later, he owns three incubator laboratories, each containing 10 houses which produce 5,000 eggs each. Abu Laban's business, however, has outgrown the parameters set by the NDB's credit ceiling. So he turned to a regular commercial bank for his last loan of LE100,000.

Nevertheless, his success prompted others in neighbouring villages to follow suit. The project for providing credit to small businessmen and producers, said Mohamed Negmeddin, director of the NBD's project at the Kasr Sakr branch of the bank, began in the village of Kasr Sakr (near El-Aas). It now includes some 800 clients from Kasr Sakr and a neighbouring village.

At first, the loans were small, ranging from LE250 to LE2,500. But after five years, the loan ceiling was raised to LE10,000.

And, said a source at USAID, by financing the project, the American donor agency sought to encourage small productive enterprises and to participate in helping solve the country's unemployment problem. The NDB, he said, has so far more than achieved its target goals by reaching an equilibrium point between the expenses and costs of the project within the agreed upon time-frame of two years since the project was launched.

While the bank originally set out to provide loans for roughly 20,000 individuals, it has, instead, provided financing for nearly 24,000 clients in the Greater Cairo area. With this measure of success already realised, USAID is currently holding negotiations for expanding the project into other governorates.

Banking for the needy

Preparations are currently under way for the establishment of an Egyptian "bank for the poor". **Reem Leila** reports

With the number of Egyptian families living under the poverty line increasing, a new bank is being established under the auspices of the Arab Council for Childhood and Development (ACCD).

The bank, modeled in structure and function after the Bangladeshi Grameen Bank, which has served as a model for similar banks in 56 countries since it was established in 1983, will offer Egyptians living in poverty a chance to secure interest-free loans. Unlike commercial banks, Grameen Bank not only offers financing, but also assists its customers in setting up small-scale income generating projects by providing technical and follow-up assistance, as well as capital.

Mohammed Younis, a Bangladeshi economist and the founder of Grameen Bank, pointed out that Grameen does not require its customers to put up collateral in order to obtain their loans. However, it lays down certain criteria which its customers are encouraged to follow such as birth control, sanitation and cleanliness of the surroundings.

He pointed out that about 94 per cent of the loans go to women in rural areas. Statistics revealed that the default rate is an amazingly low two per cent.

The main sponsor of the Egyptian version of the project, Saudi Arabia's Prince Talal Ibn Abdel-Aziz, president of ACCD, said that the primary objective of the "poor man's bank" in Egypt is establishing a credit and banking system that serves the poor, with the emphasis being on women in both rural and urban areas.

"Any serious strategy to combat poverty must deal with its various facets, starting with the rekindling of hope and the reinstatement of a sense of efficacy. In other words, the poor have to be made capable of altering their conditions. The shortest route to this provisional objective is participation," said Abdel-Aziz. "This is essentially what the poor man's bank is all about."

A preparatory committee was formed to work on the establishment of the new bank, and has taken great care to ensure that it meets the needs of its surrounding environment instead of simply copying the Grameen formula.

Lotfi El-Kholi, a leading writer and a member of the preparatory committee, says, "Our goal is to help those who are totally marginalised and to transform them into productive members of society. We want to kill poverty before it kills them". He added that the new bank will not overlap with the services of similar, already-existing projects such as the Nasser Social Bank.

El-Kholi said that most of these projects support small enterprises, but the new project is directed to those individuals who are poverty stricken and do not have access to any financial resources with which even to start a small enterprise.

The burden of collecting the new bank's capital has been shared equally by the ACCD, the National Bank of Egypt (NBE) and the Social Fund for Development (SFD), with each contributing LE1 million. The remaining start-up capital will be secured through other local Egyptian banks and businessmen who have also pledged to offer the bank financial and technical support. Certain banks, in addition to providing it with an office within their rural branches, have offered to train the new bank's staff.

The "poor man's bank" has to begin with a large capital that enables it to eradicate poverty in the Egyptian society, said Karima Korayem, a professor of economics at Al-Azhar University. The bank must also be able to cover its managerial expenses. Therefore, she said, it has to have a start-up capital of LE50 million.

"This bank has the ability to improve the living conditions of about one quarter of the country's impoverished citizens who, in turn, account for 40 per cent of Egypt's total population," said Korayem. To help bring about this reform, the bank will implement a new system by which the client is taught the concept of saving. "The clients have to pay two per cent interest on the loan as soon as they begin realising a profit. This sum is going to be part of the bank's cushioning mechanism in the event of a disaster that may happen to any of the clients," added Korayem.

According to Abdel-Aziz Hegazy, a former prime minister and member of the preparatory committee, the bank will not have a main office, as such. Instead, its employees will move out to the villages in order to deal directly with the clients, who are to form groups of five to 10 people, one of whom will be the superviser and the other, the secretary. These two individuals will be chosen from among the rest of the group in need of money.

"Close supervision will take place among each group in order to ensure that the loan is spent in the right channels. The client will pay back his loan on seasonal or yearly terms, according to the project he is working on," says Hegazy.

He also pointed out that consumerist patterns prevail in the countryside, making the transformation from a consumer system to a productive system a particularly difficult one. As a result, he stressed, the project should go beyond simply helping the poor produce goods, and also help them find suitable markets for their products.

"It's no good producing without having effective marketing", he said, adding that the new project should not be supervised by the Ministry of Economy, but rather by the Ministry of Social Affairs. Moreover, existing institutions, such as the Nasser Social Bank, should act as a link between the creditors and those in need.

Samir Issac, a professor of political science at the American University in Cairo and a senior adviser to the Social Fund for Development (SFD), agrees.

"There is no overlap between the work of the SFD and the new project," said Issac. "There can be so much cooperation between the two". He added that the new project can be viewed as part of the second phase of the SFD's vision of development. During this stage, the key aspects of success for micro-enterprise lending are "sustainability and maintainability". The SFD has introduced many successful projects since it was initiated in 1991 and there is now a pressing need to sustain these efforts, he said.

Greening the oil industry

With the help of the new technology and studies outlined in Environment '97, Egypt seems one step closer to going green, writes **Aziza Sami**

An environmental trade fair and conference organised by the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency (EEAA) last week, in which Egypt's petroleum sector participated, focused the spotlight on key environmental issues such as oil spills, air and noise pollution.

At Environment '97, participants in the conference, who included representatives of public and private sector environmental firms and organisations, underscored the environmental impact of the petroleum sector's activities. Oil exploration, drilling and production, they argued, poses tremendous risks for the surrounding urban and rural communities, as well as marine and terrestrial organisms.

As part and parcel of the conference, the trade fair portion of Environment '97 sought to cast the spotlight on the latest preventive and combative environmental technology. To this end, Egypt's Natural Gas Vehicles Company's (NGVC) new compressed natural gas (CNG) vehicles were on display as one possible solution to the ever-growing problem of air pollution. NGVC, which is jointly owned by Amoco, Egypt Gas and Enppi, is currently launching plans to open new compressed natural gas fueling stations and vehicle conversion facilities in Cairo and Alexandria. The first such fueling station in Africa and the Middle East was opened in Cairo in early 1996.

Natural gas has quickly gained popularity as an environmentally-friendly fuel source, producing less than 85 per cent of the pollutants found in benzene and no lead. To this end, Egypt's huge natural gas reserves are already being used to generate more than 80 per cent of the country's thermal electricity.

But more than just a showroom for new technology or a meeting ground for producers and consumers, the conference and trade fair also provided oil companies with a much-needed forum in which to present papers on environmental protection management systems. These systems have quickly become a cornerstone of the manner in which companies conduct business and manage their costs.

Tackling the problem of oil spills and their impact on the environment, a presentation was made at the conference on the Horus exercise. This three-day simulation, which was held in November 1996, involved an oil tanker spill scenario in the Gulf of Suez. The exercise put to the test several emergency plans devised by a number of major environmental organisations and companies, including the EEAA, the Egyptian General Petroleum Company (EGPC), Amoco Egypt, the Gulf of Suez Petroleum Company, Mobil Oil and the Oil Spill Response Ltd. An integral part of the simulation was the deployment of oil containment equipment, setting up wildlife rescue teams, as well as teams to clean up the beaches and helicopter patrols to assist 'distressed' wildlife. Equally important, however, the exercise served to highlight the petroleum sector's increasing awareness of the need to incorporate environmental fail-safe mechanisms as part of their daily operations.

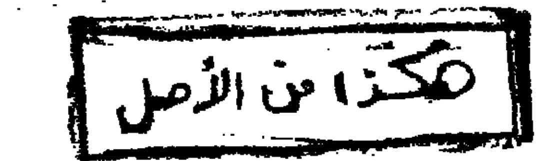
In this context, oil companies have developed Standards of Care systems that have been incorporated into their daily drilling, exploration and production activities.

"There is a loss of material (in the case of environmental accidents), and the associated cost of cleaning up material," said Gary Bose of Amoco Egypt. "Therefore, it is better to engineer an appropriate level of prevention and to ensure that the engineering systems remain at an effective standard."

"In this light, we don't budget environmental expenses separately... since many of the things that are good for the environment are also the best for engineering design," he added.

Environmental awareness on the part of the petroleum sector has led to close cooperation with the International Exploration and Production Forum, an organisation which monitors all international environmentally-related events. Similarly, environmental consulting firms, such as the US's Woodward Clyde, which worked on the Midor oil refinery, the UK's Entec, the British Petrolconsultants, have set up shop in Egypt and, like Woodward Clyde, have already had a hand in several major projects.

Edited by **Ghada Ragab**



Al-Ahram: A Diwan of contemporary life

170 Egypt got caught in the middle as Russia and Japan went to war in 1904. The reasons for the involvement were geopolitical: the Suez Canal was a vital route for Russian warships sent to the Far East to fight the Japanese. And Egypt at the time was occupied by Britain, a major player in the operation of the waterway. Egyptians generally favoured the Japanese over the Russians in the war. But the neutrality of the Suez Canal under the 1888 Constantinople Convention was maintained. **Dr Yunan Labib Rizk** tells the story on the basis of reports published by *Al-Ahram*



"Will the Orient rise again after its fall" reads the title of an article published in *Al-Ahram* by one of its readers on 6 August 1904. The author, Salib Farag, saw in the Japanese victories against the Russians, in the war that was raging between the two countries at the time, hopes for the revival of the East. The defeat of the Italian forces by the Ethiopian king eight years previously was a further indication of this trend, he argued.

Nationalist hero Mustafa Kamel wrote, beneath the title "The Rising Sun", that Japan belied all claims that the nations of the East had expired, that their political efficacy had ended and that they were incapable of arming themselves with the trappings of Western civilisation. To Mustafa Kamel, the year 1869 was "a landmark signalling the loss of Egypt and the greatness of Japan." From that point forward, the Japanese, in their eagerness to keep abreast of all new knowledge, used this knowledge to defeat the Europeans and assert their sovereignty while Egyptian society stagnated and succumbed to foreign occupation.

Also inspired by the Japan-Russian war, Egypt's Mustafa Kamel and his contemporaries had fallen under the spell of what we can term the "Japanese dream." It is a dream that contrasts sharply with the "American dream," founded upon individualism and self-assertion with the aim of acquiring wealth and fame. The "Japanese dream" by contrast was inherently a nationalist dream, expressing the yearnings for national glory. Even today, as our ties with the West grow closer, the "Japanese dream" has not lost its shimmer. We look toward the "tigers" of South-East Asia, whose nascent economic prowess was forged in the same furnace as that of Japan which began to emerge as an industrialised nation a century earlier, and which has continued to grow at astounding rates, despite the fact that it is the only country in the world, up to the present, to have suffered an atomic bomb attack.

Al-Ahram reports that the Russian-Japanese war erupted on 9 February 1904 when the Japanese navy opened fire on Russian warships anchored in Port Arthur on the Manchurian coast. Czarist Russia had been expanding eastwards in a bid to gain control over portions of the declining Chinese empire, while the rising industrial power of Japan saw in that area a natural outlet for its products. Port Arthur had changed hands between the Japanese and the Russians for some years. Japanese forces had occupied the port in 1894 but had been pressured by the government of St Petersburg to rent it to Russia until the Japanese forces reoccupied the port with the surprise attack of 1904.

A stunned world watched as events unfolded between one of the major European powers and the new power of Eastern Asia which was seeking to stake a claim among them. According to the news releases that *Al-Ahram* relayed from various news agencies and the European press, it was the general belief that Japan, known to them only as a maker of cheap fabrics, would suffer a crushing defeat. Yet as days turned into months, these expectations did not materialise. On the contrary, the ongoing warfare imposed itself to such an extent on the Egyptian press that newspapers, such as *Al-Ahram*, began to feature a daily column devoted to the developments of the war. "The field of battle" was the heading *Al-Ahram* chose for this column.

Egyptians had not expected that, within a month, this distant war would appear strikingly close to home. Yet this is what occurred in July 1904. As the war progressed, Russian warships in the Red Sea sought to intercept ships belonging to neutral countries that were delivering arms and ammunition to Japan. In particular the Czar feared Great Britain, linked to Tokyo by a friendship treaty, and the government of Germany, which sought to avenge itself upon St Petersburg for entering into a bilateral agreement with France 10 years previously. The Russian fleet's first harvest was the British ship Malaga, bringing Russia into conflict with the greatest naval power of the era. The Russians towed the British ship to Port Said at the northern end of the Suez Canal.

The apprehension of the British ship naturally triggered a diplomatic crisis which Egyptians, through the eyes of *Al-Ahram*, watched with keen interest. According to the newspaper, the Russians discovered in the ship's log that a portion of the military hardware it was carrying had been destined for the ports of Sasebo and Nagasaki while the remainder was destined for Hong Kong. The crisis was resolved when St Petersburg and London agreed that Great Britain would designate some of its ships in the Red Sea to prevent the smuggling of arms to Japan in return for which the Russians would release the British ship. The agreement nevertheless did not prevent British ships from engaging in arms smuggling. Hardly a week after the first incident, the Russians apprehended another British ship, the Ardova, and this time turned it over to the British naval commanders in Suez.

Similar incidents involving two other British ships — the Dominance and the Formosa — as well as two German ships prompted *Al-Ahram* to feature an investigative piece on the legal aspects of this maritime crisis. The article, appearing in *Al-Ahram* of 29 July 1904, was entitled "International covenants and the current crisis." The article posed the question: was the apprehension of commercial ships by the Russian fleet legal? In answer, it concluded: "The law sides with those parties that have protested the Russian action as is evidenced by the release of the Malaga after the British argued that the contents in the ships hold were destined for the British fleet in the Far East. The Russians are in no position to refute this claim."

Al-Ahram's position did not reflect Egyptian public opinion, which sided with Japan over Russia. That Japan should capture the mood of Egyptian society at this stage is due to a number of reasons. Firstly, it was a period fraught with fervent Egyptian attempts to define national identity, amid numerous conflicting ideological movements, such as pan-Islamism, Egyptian nationalism, Arab nationalism and the Eastern movement.

The notion of the larger Orient held a general appeal since ultimately it presented a looser form of cooperation than the more concretely defined political entities advocated by the other trends. Secondly, Egyptians subscribing to pan-Islamism had never forgiven Russia for putting the final nail into the coffin of the Ottoman Caliphate in the Ottoman-Russian War (1868-74) which forced the government of Istanbul for the first time to concede parts of its territory to a European power. Thirdly, Egyptian nationalists would not quickly forget Russia's intervention in the war between Mohamed Ali and the Ottoman sultan in favour of the latter with the conclusion of a defence pact in order to protect the Ottomans from the advance of the Egyptian army. In addition, Russia was the first European power to collude with Great Britain in the conclusion of the treaty of 1840, the purpose of which was to undermine the modern state Mohamed Ali had sought to establish in the Eastern Mediterranean throughout the first half of the 19th century. Moreover, the Russians, as one of the foreign powers to enjoy the immunities guaranteed them in Egypt under the capitulation system, had offended Egyptian sensibilities, since they used the immunities to protect the Russian-run brothels in Egypt. The anti-Russian mood and pro-Japan leanings were apparent throughout the war, and *Al-Ahram* had no alternative but to record them.

Another consequence of the arms smuggling operations during the Russian-Japanese war was to bring the neutrality of the Suez Canal into question. In August 1904 a member of the House of Commons asked Prime Minister Arthur Balfour: "How can the British government permit the Russians to pass through the canal when one of their ships is towing a captured British ship?" The prime minister responded, "The Russians did not violate the neutrality of the canal as long as they did not perform an act of aggression within its confines." He continued, "I remind you and I remind the English nation that the Suez Canal is subject to the supervision of all nations. No single nation has the right to dictate to the Egyptian government the manner in which they should operate it. If it is announced that a nation engaged in war has captured a ship and desires to take this war bounty through the canal, they have every right to traverse the canal unimpeded as long as this action has not violated any of the international treaties governing the canal. It is not England alone that governs the canal, but a mixed international consortium."

In light of Balfour's speech, Egyptians' attention was drawn to the Constantinople Convention of 29 October 1888 pertaining to the neutrality of the canal. Of particular concern were articles four and seven.

Article 4 stipulated, "Insofar as the canal shall remain open in times of war, freedom of navigation shall be permitted even to those warships belonging to the nations engaged in war. Therefore, the contracting parties hereby pledge not to use any act of war or to engage in any hostile action that would obstruct the freedom of navigation in the canal, in any of its ports and within a range of three nautical miles from these ports... Battleships passing through the canal must do so as quickly as possible, without stopping for reasons other than the purposes of servicing the ships. In addition, the period of stay in either Port Said or Port Suez shall not exceed 24 hours." As for Article 7, it reads, "No nation may retain any of their battleships within the territorial waters of the canal or within Lake Timsah and the Bitter Lakes."

The Russian warships at that point were in the greatest need of the canal. Both the demands of maintaining supply lines and the need to replace its massive losses at sea required a continual procession of ships from the Black Sea and the Baltic through the Mediterranean and the Suez Canal toward the Indian Ocean and Pacific. Against this background there emerged a dispute over the interpretation of the 1888 Convention when the Egyptian Council of Ministers passed a decree supported by the Ottomans, providing for a minimum three-month interval between warship transits for any country. Undoubtedly, the amendment was instigated at the prompting of the British who were seeking to disadvantage the Russian war effort. *Al-Ahram* of 8 March 1904 confirms this: "The question of the neutrality of the Suez Canal has evolved into an issue of heated international debate when Russia protested the decision promulgated by the Egyptian government and approved by the Supreme Porte prohibiting the passage of the fleets of any of the two warring countries through the canal until a period of three months has lapsed since the previous crossing. Russia has protested that the canal is an international waterway... The British government has responded that it supports the decision of the international commissioners who have the right to settle this issue."

Meanwhile, developments on the war front itself would enhance Egyptian sympathies for the Japanese. On 24 March 1905, *Al-Ahram* reports that the Russian defences had collapsed. The newspaper attributed this to the fact that "the Russian army was very poorly organised and they did not avail themselves of their 25,000-strong cavalry, which is superior to any on earth. Instead, they entrenched themselves and waited for the enemy to attack, affording the enemy the opportunity to gain in strength and momentum. This was due to poor coordination among the Russian military commanders. Every Russian commander acts independently in accordance with his own style of command and his individual whim whereas the Japanese have learned the lesson from that sort of disorder."

In spite of the friendly relations binding Japan and Great Britain during that war, Egyptians saw in the Japanese victory a blow directed against the British presence in the Far East. As *Al-Ahram* wrote, "The land of the rising sun imperils the empire upon which the sun never sets."



The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.

Money & Business

Egyptian appliances displayed in Germany

COMPETING among hundreds of other countries, Egypt is currently displaying its latest products in the area of electrical appliances in an exhibition taking place in Cologne, Germany from 17-22 February. The exhibition, considered to be one of the largest of its kind worldwide, is held every other year.

Mohamed Guneidi, vice-chairman of the 6th of October Investors Association and chairman of the GMC Group, said that Egypt's ability to participate in the exhibition and compete with other major companies in the world reflects the high *quality of Egyptian products. He added that Egypt's participation* in such an exhibition has the potential to increase the country's export rate.

Bridging the gap

CITY Training and Studies Centre is organising its annual festival for 1.1 million handicapped persons. The festival, now in its fourth year, will start on 7 March with a marathon which will begin on 7 March on the Corniche in Agouza, followed by a parade from the Balloon Theatre to the Student's Federation building.

Related activities include an arts and crafts fair, which will take place on 9 March at the American University in Cairo.

The festival will conclude with a show at the Cairo International Conference Centre.

The annual event is aimed at bridging the gap between the disabled and society.

USAID programme to include private ventures

EGYPTIAN private sector companies can now benefit from USAID's new programme designed to help Egyptian small and medium-scale ventures to acquire *state-of-the-art US technology to* enhance Egyptian products' competitive edge in the global market.

To this end, two resource centres were established in Cairo and Alexandria, managed by a team of American and Egyptian staff with expertise in the field. The centres are *aimed at boosting bilateral efforts to* enrich human resources, increasing productivity, providing technological services for techno-based industries as well as outlining sound technological strategies required by these ventures.

The 3-year programme is expected to result in developing new markets for exports. It will cost $13.5 million and will be implemented in cooperation with the Egyptian Ministry of Economy, the *Ministry of Scientific Research and* the Egyptian Federation of Industries.

Desertification conference next week

CAIRO will play host to a *conference on desertification*, which will be attended by delegates from 75 countries. The conference, slated for next week, will be a forum for 120 research *papers to be* presented on ways of combating desertification and maintaining natural resources.

Dr Ismail Ramli, secretary-general of the conference, said that delegates will be able to witness the ongoing Egyptian experience in *cultivating desert areas* in the Ismailia, Fayoum and Aswan governorates. Ramli added that the similar efforts to combat *desertification* will be exerted in Nuweiba, Sadat City, El-Salam Canal and the New Valley.

National Bank of Egypt: A pioneer in the banking industry

IN A persistent quest for improving its performance, and coping with the recent developments in banking services, the National Bank of Egypt (NBE) saves no effort to adopt state-of-the-art technology as well *as recent banking innovations*. The bank, breaking through the 21st century with steady steps, is considered the first to adopt the interface programme to link two of the best world systems of international dealings, namely, Kondor and Opics.

Kondor system efficiently carries out all the operations of the dealing room, including foreign exchange and the operations of international money and capital markets. The *system also provides viable means* for risk management related to the said operations, namely, the management of the bank's position of different currencies in addition to gapping. Moreover, Kondor covers such risks via forward contracts, FX *& interest rate swaps, future con*tracts and FX & interest rate options.

On the other end of the spectrum, Opics is considered the best electronic system covering the operations of the back office. It provides unique privileges, mainly, a firm control of the dealing room operations via meticulous management of the bank's foreign accounts; and a clear determination of each dealer's powers and responsibilities. It also sets piecemeal and precise rules for *revising operations starting from the* orders made by customers to the implementation and reporting thereof to the bank branch. This ensures a sound and brisk implementation of such operations and the best prices for the customer.

*Moreover, the system makes ac*counting entries and issues SWIFT messages related to the electronic transfer of money, which is conducive to a more efficient banking performance. In addition, Opics keeps the bank multicurrency as well as Egyptian pound general ledgers, and finally provides an integrated administrative information system, serving thus the senior management's needs related to planning and control objectives.

The future vision of the tanning industry

THE CHAMBER of Leather Tanning, one of the divisions of the Egyptian Federation of Industries, recently convened its annual general assembly. Mamdouh Thabit Mekki, head of the chamber and undersecretary of the federation, explained that chamber's vision of the future revolves around number of important points. Firstly, he expressed the necessity of removing obstacles facing tanners, such as a 10 per cent sales tax and a six per cent service tax which is currently levied upon materials and goods used in tanning.

Mekki also called for amending and revising current economic laws in order to increase both quality and quantity of production while, at the same time, reducing expenses. By doing this, he stressed, the industry will be able to keep abreast and adapt to the changes taking place in the tanning industry worldwide. Within this context, it is human resources which will play a key role, for their development will allow the industry to realise its full potential.

The heart of the matter lies in providing the industry with the necessary infrastructure to enable such changes to take place. Mekki indicated that the chamber is seeking funds to establish a special zone for tanners in Badr City. Such a zone would have the necessary infrastructure and tanners would be given easy-term grants and loans to encourage them to move to the new zone. Turning his comments to the role of the chamber during the forthcoming period, Mekki indicated that the chamber would exert efforts to have policies and laws that affect the tanning industry implemented. This is in addition to following-up on the latest technological innovations with regards to the tanning industry worldwide and incorporating such technology into the Egyptian industry.

Mekki was quick to stress the need of the tanning industry to produce high-quality products within an environmentally-friendly context. Doing so, he said, will enable Egyptian tanned leather to compete in the international market with the overall goal of increasing exports.

All parties concerned are presently intensifying their efforts to facilitate the transfer of tanneries from Cairo and Alexandria to Badr City. We should now ask, said Mekki, what steps should be taken in order to make the tanning industry more environmentally-conscious. At the same time, it must be asked what steps must be taken to transfer tanneries to Badr City. By overcoming these challenges via upgrading and renovation, the Egyptian tanning industry will be able to compete on a global scale and in the long run, add to the already growing number of Egyptian exports.

Al-Ahram Weekly

Jim Crowstein laws

Roughly 11 years after Israel set up its "buffer zone" in southern Lebanon, members of the Knesset now find themselves debating whether the cost of the occupation is commensurate to the area's strategic value. Their sudden burst of ambivalence, however, is not a result of the fact that the only victims of Israel's latest bombing in southern Lebanon were a Lebanese woman and a Hizbullah radio station antenna. Nor is it the product of recently-surfacing feelings of guilt over the deaths of over 170 people in Qana earlier last year. What it takes for Israelis to reconsider its Lebanon policy, it seems, are the deaths of 73 Israeli soldiers aboard two Lebanon-bound helicopters that collided in mid-air earlier this month.

Pundits and some parliamentarians see this brand of forced introspection as a means for a potential breakthrough in the stalled Syrian-Israeli peace negotiations. For example, getting Syria to agree to a mutual withdrawal would not only negate the need for such a buffer zone, but would also stand as a testimony to its commitment to peace and normalisation of relations. Short of realising that goal, a unilateral withdrawal would, at the very least, minimise the risk of such accidents. Both scenarios, however, provide Israel with enough manoeuvering room for launching a unilateral military response "should the need arise".

Nowhere in these formulas are the welfare or rights of the Lebanese considered. Instead, the only consideration is the safety of the *kibbutzim* on the Lebanese-Israeli border, or the fact that 181 Israeli soldiers have died in Lebanon since it set up this security zone. In fact, that Israelis see these factors as justification for their military operations merely underscores the disturbing reality that normalisation of relations actually means maintaining the status quo. Death has, for decades, been the norm, as has Israel's continued, flagrant disregard for the rights of surrounding nations and peoples. So, when it comes to the calculus of valuing human life and the definition of individual rights, Israel has devised its own set of Jim Crow laws where Arab lives are worth even less than two-thirds of their Israeli counterparts.

Al-Ahram Weekly

Chairman of the Board .... **Ibrahim Nafie**
Editor-in-Chief .... **Hosny Guindy**
Managing Editor .... **Hani Shukrallah**
Assistant Editor .... **Wadie Kirolos**
Assistant Editor .... **Mona Anis**
Layout Editor .... **Samir Sobhi**
General Manager for Advertising .... **Adel Afifi**

Al-Ahram Offices

Main office
AL-AHRAM, Al-Galaa St. Cairo.
Telephones: 5786100/5786200/5786300/5786400/5786500
Telex: 20185/93346 Fax: 5786126/5786833

Overseas offices

USA
Washington DC: Atef El-Ghamri, Al-Ahram Office, Suite 1258, 529 National Press Bldg, Washington DC 20045; Tel: (202)-737-2121/2122.
New York: Atef El-Ghamri, Al-Ahram Office, 39th Fl., Chrysler Bldg., 405 Lexington Ave, New York, NY 10174-0300; Tel: (212)972 6440; Telex: 497 9426 ITT U.I.; Fax: (212) 286 0285.
Los Angeles: Soraya Aboul Seoud, 600 S. Curson Ave., 402 LA, CA 90036, USA: Tel: (213)-857-0941; Fax: (213)-857-7084.

Russia
Moscow: Abdel-Malek Khalil, Ahram Office, Kutuzovski Pro Dom 7/4 Kv. 50, Moscow; Tel: 243 4014/ 243 1424; Fax: 230 2879

Canada
Montreal: Mustafa Samy Sadek, Al-Ahram Office, 800 Rene-Levesque Blvd, West Suite 2440, Montreal H3B 1X9, Quebec; Tel: (514)876 7825 Fax: (514) 876 9262/ (514)876 7825.

United Kingdom
London: Amr Abdel-Samie. Al-Ahram Office, 203 - 209 North Gower street London NW1 2NJ
Tel: 0171 388 1155, Fax: 0171 388 3130

France
Paris: Sherif El-Shoubashy, Bureau Al-Ahram 26, Rue Marbeuf, 75008 Paris; Tel: (1) 537 72700; Al-Ahram F.; Fax: (1) 428-93963.

Germany
Frankfurt: Mohamed Eissa El-Sharkawi, Al-Ahram Bureau Friedrichstr. 15, 60323 Frankfurt, Tel: (069) 9714380/ (069) 9714381 Fax: (069) 729571.

Austria
Vienna: Mustafa Abdalla, 2331 Vosendorf Orts Str. 253; Tel: 692965/ 694805; Telex: 13 2726 GIGI A; Telefax: 694805.

Greece
Athens: Abdel-Azim Darwish, 69 Solonos St., Third floor, Kolonaki 106-79, Athens, Greece. Tel. and Fax :3634503.

Japan
Tokyo: Mohamed El-Dessouki, Duke Aoyama 4-11, Higashi 4 - Chome Shibuya - Ku, Room 402, Tokyo; Tel: (03) 340 63944; Fax: (03) 340 6625

Italy
Mustafa Abdallah [S.A.B. 2000] 00191 ROMA-V. Guido Bant, 34. Tel: 3332250 Fax: 3332294

Brazil
Rio de Janeiro: Ahmed Shedid, Cx. Postal 2395, CEP. 20001.

Annual Subscription Rates

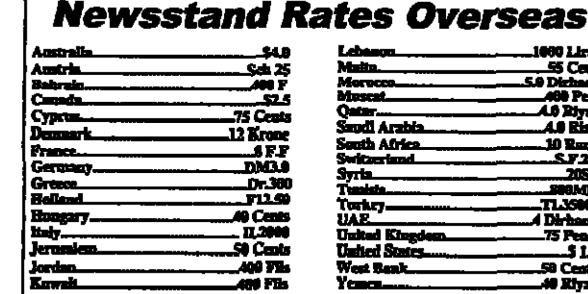
Egypt LE39.00
Arab Countries $60.00
Other Countries $150.00

Send your subscription order to:
Al-Ahram Subscriptions Department,
Al-Galaa St. Cairo, Egypt.
Subscription payments can be made directly in cash or by cheque to the same address.

Name ....

Mailing Address ....

Newsstand Rates Overseas



Australia	$4.0	Lebanon	1000 Liras
Austria	Sch 25	Malta	55 Cents
Bahrain	400 F	Morocco	5.0 Dirhams
Canada	$2.5	Muscat	400 Pesa
Cyprus	75 Cents	Qatar	4.0 Riyals
Denmark	12 Krone	Saudi Arabia	4.0 Rials
France	8 F.F	South Africa	10 Rand
Germany	DM3.0	Switzerland	S.F2.0
Greece	Dr.300	Syria	20SL
Holland	Fl2.50	Tunisia	800Mils
Hungary	40 Cents	Turkey	TL35000
Italy	IL2000	UAE	4 Dirhams
Jerusalem	50 Cents	United Kingdom	75 Pence
Jordan	400 Fils	United States	$1.5
Kuwait	400 Fils	West Bank	50 Cents
		Yemen	40 Riyals

Confusion in Copenhagen

Intellectuals are not diplomats, writes **Ahmed Youssef**; too ready with compromises, too willing to agree on less than the bare minimum, the Denmark delegates may well have done more harm than good

The meeting of Arab and Israeli intellectuals and public figures that took place at the end of last month in Copenhagen and the declaration issued at the outcome of this meeting have aroused wide controversy and fuelled a heated debate amongst Egyptian intellectuals. Those who participated were charged with treachery, betrayal and making unnecessary concessions, while critics of the meeting were accused of overreacting and exaggerating.

While I do not wish to take part in this exchange, I disagree with the logic of the Copenhagen meeting and declaration. In my opinion, both revealed a confusion between the role of the intellectual and that of the politician and diplomat. Some regard the declaration as reasonable and hope that it will materialise on the ground, given the reference it makes to the Palestinians' right to self-determination, including statehood. Others disagree and see the declaration as a catastrophe.

The declaration's apologists compare it with the Oslo Accords and protocols; they see it as an improvement on the measures currently being adopted in the Palestinian-Israeli peace talks. In contrast, critics, including myself, regard the participants as intellectuals, not as diplomats. It is not up to the intellectual — acting on the pretext that there is a popular base advocating peace — to rush into negotiations and make compromises which depart from the recognised Arab position in negotiations. The duty of the intellectual at this stage is to stress Arab rights violated by Israel, with the support of its international backers, to find the means of restoring these rights and to participate in the battle to defend Arab national identity.

No one is denying that certain groups in Israel adopt positions that correspond with the official Arab conception of a settlement. Nor is anyone denying that international forces could lend support to the official Arab position in the current peace process. It remains, however, that one cannot take a stand given the confusion between the role of the intellectual and that of the official negotiators.

Due to this confusion, the signatories to the Copenhagen Declaration supported political positions that do not articulate the minimum Arab conception of a comprehensive and fair settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Instead of clearly and frankly addressing the forces obstructing efforts toward a peaceful settlement, the Copenhagen signatories again gave their backing to the full implementation of the Palestinian-Israeli agreements, which until today have only created more problems than they solved. These agreements have set grave precedents for a final settlement, such as the settlers' rights to Israeli protection inside Palestinian territories and the failure to obtain the right to Palestinian supervision of Islamic holy sites (the Ibrahimi Mosque) under the Hebron agreement.

The document issued in Copenhagen also failed to emphasise either Arab rights in Jerusalem, or the rights of Palestinian refugees which are backed by international laws and UN resolutions. It failed to condemn the existence of Israeli settlements in occupied Arab land or insist on the removal of settlements. This is a position on which the Arabs receive full international backing. But the signatories merely called for a fair agreement without defining their stance on these issues.

As far as the settlements are concerned, the document only managed to stipulate a freeze on construction. Similarly, it stated that special attention should be paid to the Jerusalem issue in the final status negotiations, "to satisfy the requirements of all parties." There was no reference, however, to the Israeli claim, and the consensus among the main political forces in Israel, that Jerusalem is the united and eternal capital of Israel.

Equally conspicuous was the absence of any reference to the Palestinians' right to resist occupation in all its forms — again, a right backed by international law. No mention was even made of the ramifications of Israel's continued occupation, which can only lead to further, legitimate resistance, as contemporary national liberation movements worldwide have amply demonstrated. An immediate and unconditional end to the Israeli occupation is a *sine qua non* condition of avoiding more bloodshed. Surprisingly, the Copenhagen documents deplored the use of violence or terrorism in any form, at a time when the Arab signatories of the document know full well that Israel and the international forces backing it equate any form of legitimate resistance to the Israeli occupation with terrorism.

Additionally, instead of emphasising the return of the Golan in exchange for security guarantees and full, peaceful relations between Syria and Israel, the Copenhagen document simply repeated vague diplomatic generalities on the exchange of land for peace and the relevant UN resolutions. The document does not denounce Israel's nuclear hegemony in the Middle East and the danger this poses to Egyptian, Arab and regional security; it does not condemn the unprecedented accumulation of weapons in Israel's military arsenal, which has increased the gap in the Arab-Israeli balance of power and hindered Arab attempts to build a minimum defence capability to address this inbalance. The Copenhagen document simply urges all forces in the region to join hands to build a region free of weapons of mass destruction.

There is no denying that the Copenhagen document had some positive sides. For instance, the document emphasised Palestinians' right to self-determination, including the right to statehood in accordance with international law. These aspects, however, were made ambiguous by the nature of the document itself, which makes Palestinian rights to self-determination and statehood contingent upon the terms of the final agreement.

One can argue that it was difficult for the participants to formulate a more radical document, given their diverse backgrounds. Here we come to the essence of the confusion mentioned earlier, over intellectuals assuming the role of official negotiators and even dictating terms to the official negotiators. Some have argued that the Copenhagen represents a breakthrough in the position of Israeli intellectuals. I beg to differ: the Copenhagen Declaration does not even meet the minimum positions on settlement issues that some Israeli forces have expressed.

The Copenhagen meeting only reflected the Arab participants' retreat from the recognised official Arab conception of settlement as incorporated in the 1982 Fez formula. This may explain the absence of a number of Egyptian intellectuals from Copenhagen, even though some of them advocate dialogue with sympathetic Israeli forces as a means of improving the Arab position. Their absence underscores the confusion in Copenhagen. It also confirms that progress cannot be achieved according to the lines drawn by the Copenhagen meeting and the document that it issued. If we continue to confuse the role of the intellectual with that of the diplomat, the Arabs will lose the enlightened support of intellectuals who believe in defending Arab rights in the confrontation with Israel.

The writer is a professor of political science at Cairo University.

An Arab counter-strategy

Mohamed Sid-Ahmed proposes the creation of a counterpole to the aggregate of disparate forces now drawn towards the Netanyahu pole

When he welcomed Netanyahu to the White House last week, Clinton was inaugurating a new stage in the Middle East peace negotiations in the hope that his second term as president could eventually achieve a peace arrangement in the region which would not only assure him a place in history but also secure American interests in the area by guaranteeing both the security of Israel and the stability of Arab oil.

Clinton proceeded from the assumption that Netanyahu's acceptance to sign the Hebron agreement marked a turning point that opened the door to the final stage of the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations and could help bring about a resumption of the Syrian-Israeli talks. To encourage Netanyahu, the American president has promised to spare no effort in bolstering Israel's security and ensuring its military superiority over all the Arab countries put together. Making what he called a concession in return, Netanyahu agreed to take into account the 'understandings' that had been reached between Syria and the previous Israeli Labour government — provided, however, that the Syrians produced evidence that these 'understandings' actually exist.

In the next few weeks, President Mubarak, Chairman Arafat and King Hussein respectively will also be visiting Washington to help resuscitate the peace process. That is why it has become imperative that the Arabs develop a strategy for the coming crucial negotiations. In preparation for these negotiations, a document has been ironed out between a close associate of Peres, Yossi Beilin, and a close associate of Netanyahu, Michael Eitan, to define how far Labour and Likud can agree on issues concerning the final talks with the Palestinians. It is true that the document has not been endorsed officially by the two parties, but both admit that it exists and represents a position paper that can be referred to whenever the need arises. It also reflects a tendency towards creating a coalition government in Israel along the lines of the ones formed at previous critical moments, such as just before the Six-Day War. The Copenhagen meeting, which included Israelis and Arabs from all the front-line states except Syria, can be seen as another link in a chain of agreements now taking shape on terms acceptable to the Likud.

This situation places the Arab parties before serious challenges. I have always maintained that the peace process has so far succeeded only in freezing the main contradiction between Israel and the Arab states. It has not eliminated contradictions as a whole, but has displaced them into Israeli society on the one hand and into the Arab world on the other, whether between the Arab sates or inside Arab societies. Despite the selective nature of Israel's democracy, which works only as far as its Jewish citizens are concerned, there is no doubt that it helps Israel weather its internal crises more or less successfully. The same cannot be said of the Arab world.

Thus what has been attributed to peace is not genuine peace, but the displacement of the most acute contradictions in the region into the Arab world, and because many Arab intellectuals refuse to make distinctions between Israelis on the grounds that all are Zionist, they deliberately abstain from exploiting the contradictions within Israeli society. Against this backdrop, the Copenhagen Declaration has done more to intensify inter-Arab differences than to deepen contradictions between peace forces and supporters of Netanyahu's anti-peace line inside Israel.

One positive effect of the Copenhagen Declaration has been to bring an end to the practice of Arab intellectuals meeting with Israelis in secret. But the end of secrecy means that people engaged in public debate can no longer use the argument of ignorance to disclaim responsibility. From now on, they cannot reduce their participation to denunciation and rejection, but are faced with the obligation to come forward with alternatives.

So far, the debate that has unfolded in Egypt has been more successful in identifying issues of procedure than issues of substance. Everybody now agrees that a distinction must be made in peace efforts between the role of intellectuals and that of negotiators. Everybody also agrees that the activities of intellectuals in this respect must be open and accountable. But no agreement has yet been reached on how to tackle issues of substance.

Highly qualified representatives of a variety of political trends published in *Al-Ahali* yesterday a counter-document to the Copenhagen Declaration. I welcome that initiative because it extends the national debate to the entire political spectrum and creates a counter-pole to the aggregate of disparate forces now drawn towards the Netanyahu pole. Moreover, I believe the debate should be depersonalised and based on written documents to focus on the arguments rather than on the individuals who present them, and ensure that the debate remains objective and includes all trends in the political arena.

Satan stymied

By Naguib Mahfouz



I am completely bowled over by the Satan-worship phenomenon, and am convinced that what we have learned about it is only the tip of the iceberg. We should study the matter thoroughly to really understand its dimensions. I had asked Dr Yehia El-Rakhawi to write on the subject, and was happy when he obliged and published an article last week. I also asked a friend who uses the Internet to research this phenomenon in an attempt to discover the reasons for its existence abroad and the philosophy of those who practice it, so that we should be better able to cope with it here.

Much has been written on the subject to date, most of it slanted according to the writer's personal inclination. Those who call for greater political participation attribute Satan worship to a lack of participation, while those writers interested in education insist that it is an educational phenomenon. Neither of these explanations are convincing: the countries in which the cult is practiced can hardly be accused of a lack of political participation or educational facilities.

When a new disease appears, the medical profession, in cooperation with laboratory researchers, advise that normal health precautions be taken until a cure is discovered: reasonable nutrition, exercise, sun and clean air, etc...

I propose that, until we discover the reasons for the existence of this cult, we apply social health measures, since it is a social problem. In my opinion, the social health measures to apply are the following:

A sound religious, ethical and social upbringing for the young.

An attempt to fill up the vacuum in young people's lives with sports, culture, active social interaction, and participation in political affairs. All of these activities will give them freedom within legal bounds. This would develop sound principles among young people; it would encourage those with talent and give all youngsters an assurance that they will have an active role in the community. These measures — just like public health precautions — should be taken whether there are Satan worshippers or not.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmawy.

The Press This Week

Playing with fire

Al-Akhbar: "What stands out is the way in which the government reacted to this terrible crime. It reacted in a traditional — I do not want to say negative — way by issuing statements of condemnation which also emphasise the solidity of the home front. What is required is a political rather than an administrative or security solution. I think that the prime minister should have attended the funeral of those killed and personally offered condolences to their families. Then Upper Egyptians would not feel 'distant' from the Cairo government. Our problem in Egypt is that political action is absent and this is one of the reasons for the growth of terrorism."
(Said Sonbol, 16 February)

Al-Ahram: "It is in the best interest of Egypt to make it clear that these 'armed groups' are rejected by and stand isolated from the Egyptian people and that an attack on the Copts is an attack on all the Egyptians. We should look into the reasons which hinder the 'normalisation' of the security situation in El-Minya and why it remains the setting for these bloody crimes. There must be some special factors that encourage violence and crime in this governorate in particular!"
(Salama Ahmed Salama, 16 February)

Al-Wafd: "One cannot help thinking that there is a foreign conspiracy behind the Abu Qurqas operation. It comes just before the forthcoming visit of President Mubarak to the US and purports to show that the Copts are subject to persecution and killing at the hands of the Muslims in Egypt so as to tarnish Egypt's image before the world... Once again we say that the terrorists should keep their hands off our brother Copts — our partners now and in the future, for better and for worse and in land and history."
(Editorial, 14 February)

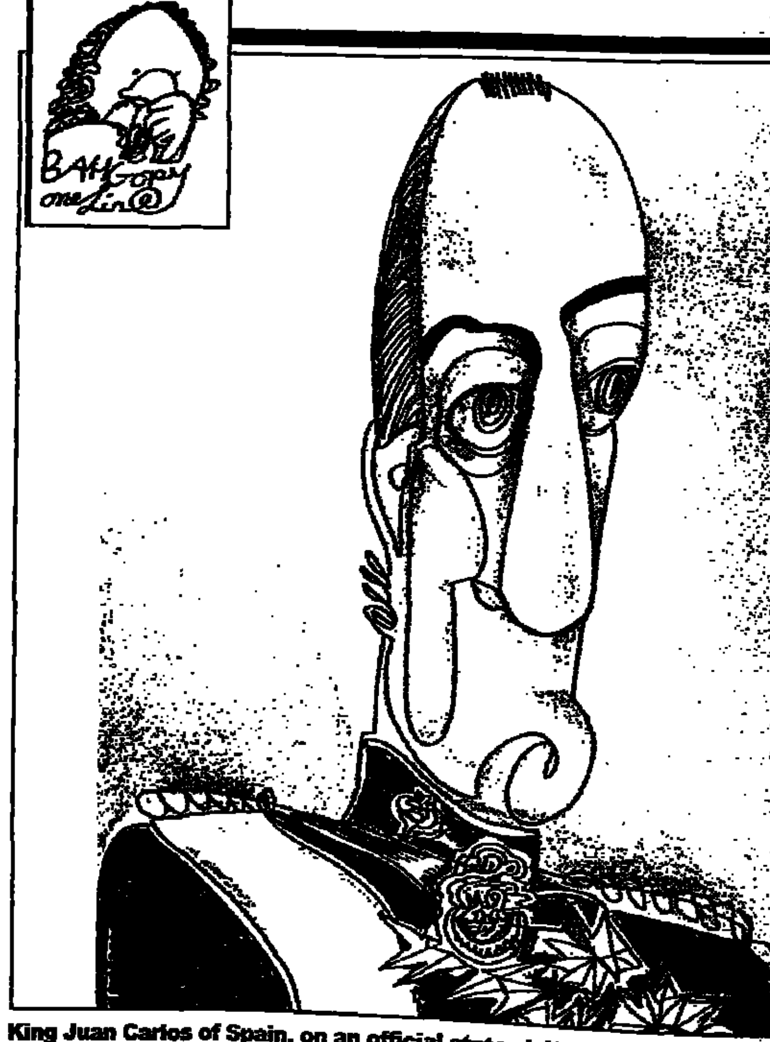
Al-Gomhuria: "I wish that the minister of *awqaf* had visited Abu Qurqas as soon as the terrible crime took place — a ruthless unexpected crime against our dear sons. Being 'late' on such occasions is inappropriate! And I hope that this visit will not only be restricted to paying condolences. It should be the first step to reviving the old practice of sending religious preaching missions on nationwide tours. These missions should include Muslims and Copts as well as sociologists, psychologists and economists. Our main problem is that our enthusiasm quickly fades away and we move back into the same old vicious circle, time and again."
(Samir Ragab, 17 February)

Akhbar El-Yom: "The angry reaction to the Abu Qurqas crime is the best reply to all conspirators. The condemnation expressed by the entire nation shows that Egypt is capable of cutting off the hand of anyone attempting to undermine national unity, stability, sovereignty or Egypt's role. The battle against terrorism may go on for some time but national unity will remain intact. There may be an increase in foreign campaigns against Egypt, but it would be a mistake to think that this will lead to any change in its policy. Time will show that those who nurture and propagate terrorism will be the first to pay the price; he who plays with fire will get burnt."
(Galal Aref, 15 February)

Rose El-Youssef: "Every time President Mubarak prepares to visit Washington, strange things unfold into an already familiar scenario. This scenario begins with a hostile article against Egypt in a well-known and influential newspaper in the US. It highlights existing problems — terrorism if there is a current wave of it, corruption if that is rife, peace if Israel is anxious about it. This is usually followed by pamphlets and advertisements issued by Coptic organisations in the US and Canada which describe the persecution of Copts in Egypt as though there were Nazi gas chambers in the country... Then terrorism steps in. A terrorist group inevitably carries out an armed attack against Copts or their churches in Upper Egypt so that the evidence is all the more damning."
(Adel Hamouda, 17 February)

Al-Ahram: "In any crime the investigator usually looks for criminals by considering who would benefit from the crime. Yet here we stand before a crime from which no one can benefit except the enemies of Egypt and its progress... Are there devious hands meddling in our country, wishing to set fire in the big home called Egypt?"
(Ahmed Bahgat, 17 February)

Compiled by **Hala Saqr**



King Juan Carlos of Spain, on an official state visit to Egypt this week, is a modern, democratic monarch whose physiognomy nonetheless betrays his distinguished, aristocratic pedigree. The wide eyes denote the attention to detail that proved so important in steering Spain towards democracy. I tried to render his height, which one can only describe as regal, by giving his neck and nose unusual dimensions.

Close up

Salama A. Salama

Nothing to declare

There is nothing to suggest, as the season of visits to Washington begins, that the new Clinton administration has succeeded in devising a strategy suitable for the resumption of the peace process in the Middle East, nor that it has a clear idea of how to deal with the Likud administration led by Netanyahu.

All the Israeli prime minister's visit to Washington confirmed was that the US has succeeded in adapting itself to the new Likud policy, not the reverse. US foreign policy priorities were clearly demonstrated when Madeleine Albright, the new secretary of state, decided to start her term in office with a marathon trip to Europe and Asia, leaving the Middle Eastern portfolio with the American co-ordinator, Dennis Ross.

Declarations concerning Netanyahu's discussions in Washington confirmed that Israel's policy on the resumption of negotiations with Syria had not changed noticeably, and the meagre results announced by Netanyahu following his Washington discussion confirmed these expectations. Worse: American policy, following Israel's diktat, was to dash Arab hopes, pinned on the idea that Clinton's new administration would be firmer and better able to push the peace process in the directions previously agreed upon. The *exact opposite occurred.* America agreed that the Arabs needed to enlarge the scope of normalisation with Israel and backed Netanyahu's refusal to withdraw from south Lebanon. The US satisfied Israel's demands for AF-5 planes while quietly ignoring Israel's objections to the supply of *AF-16* fighters to Saudi Arabia.

Nobody knows yet what Netanyahu's new proposals for the Syrian track are. To judge from the secrecy surrounding them (the Syrians themselves do not believe any proposals have been tabled), he probably intends to suggest the resumption of negotiations with Syria and reiterate his refusal to honour any previous pledges *or* results obtained from the Peres government. In his joint press conference with Netanyahu, Clinton was cautious and non-committal. He did not reaffirm the new administration's pledge to abide by the Madrid principles, nor did he mention his administration's expressed *intention* to play a positive role in the peace negotiations. In other words, Clinton's administration has totally accepted Netanyahu's conditions regarding peace with Syria. This suggests *that* the Syrian track is not a top priority for American policy. Does that mean the Palestinian track *will be the main object* of efforts to advance peace?

Apart from the hubbub created around the Hebron agreement, and despite all its defects, the eight committees will be fully taken up with trying to find solutions; but President Clinton will also be *non-committal* on this count, disregarding *the basic principles* which could give moral support to the Palestinians as they approach final-status negotiations. So it is no surprise that David Levy, Israel's minister of foreign affairs, should hasten to warn the Palestinians against mentioning either *settlers or settlements* in the forthcoming negotiations.

The Palestinian-Israeli negotiations cannot be expected to create a suitable climate for extending the peace process to the Syrian and Lebanese tracks, or to Arab-Israeli relations in general. Clearly, Israel will replace the 30 remaining points of negotiation for the transitional phase *by three* hundred objections, conditions and *stipulations.* Nothing and nobody will be able to stop it from extending the construction of settlements in the West bank, seizing more land in Jerusalem and violating Palestinian plans to build their own state.

Netanyahu's visit and its consequences *had to force* the Arabs to wake up to the fact that the new Clinton administration will not adopt a more *positive* and effective policy for peace in the *Middle* East. We must realise we have come to a new turning point, where American and Israeli policies have fused. The Arabs have a long and futile wait ahead.

Gomaa
I demand the whole of the Golan
So do I

Soapbox

Death by discrimination

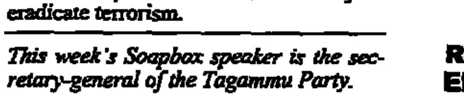
Surprise, and not just anger and revulsion, was the immediate reaction to the random murder of Christians inside the church in Abu Qurqas. The killing of citizens, whose only sin was to be Christian, cannot possibly forward the cause of Islam, which exhorts believers to win others over by love and compassion, and warns that he who hardens his heart against men will find himself without a friend. The Qur'an also forbids discrimination against the followers of the revealed religions.

Is this criminal act expected to help convert Christians to Islam? What use is a faith adopted under compulsion? Would such a conversion be anything but hypocrisy, hateful in the eyes of Islam? The leaders of Islamist gangs today eat the crumbs off "Christian" tables: they live in and are protected by European states. The crime, rather, is intended to foster animosity in the US on the eve of Mubarak's visit by provoking the Coptic community there.

This crime, however heinous, was foolish. The perpetrators have *only succeeded in kindling the hatred of Christians and* Muslims alike. Their hands are stained not only with the blood of the children they killed outside the church, but with the blood of the entire nation.



But whatever the killers' aim, condemnation is not enough. The official press itself is often inconsistent, and at times betrays a bias. The educational system aggravates the rift: textbooks refer to Christians as infidels, and administrative decisions commonly discriminate on the basis of religion. This attitude is at the root of terrorism. In addressing terrorism, we must uproot discrimination, for there is no other way to eradicate terrorism.



This week's Soapbox speaker is the secretary-general of the Tagammu Party.

Rifaat El-Said

Towards a peoples' peace

Lutfi El-Kholi maps out the road to Copenhagen; the ideas and actions that led to an alliance for Middle East peace

The significance of the Copenhagen declaration above all is that, after nearly half a century of military and political confrontation that has cost all parties to the Arab-Israeli conflict dearly, and the failure to reach a comprehensive and just political settlement through negotiations within a reasonable period of time, a collection of *intellectuals* from Egypt, Palestine, Jordan and Israel have undertaken — *on their own initiative, and with the support of* European intellectuals — an initiative in order to break the current vicious circle.

This initiative — the first of its kind in the history of this conflict — was to engage in a series of dialogues that culminated in an international grassroots conference in Denmark on 30 January 1997. At the outcome, a declaration was issued establishing a global/regional movement open to all popular forces, aimed at involving these forces in monitoring the Middle East conflict and the chronically bogged-down negotiations with view to achieving a just *and comprehensive settlement by the end of the century.*

In other words, these intellectuals, all convinced of the *need for a settlement in spite of their diverse cultural,* political and intellectual backgrounds, have sought to lay the foundations for a new international/regional situation, or rather a new cultural/political reality. The idea is to generate a grassroots movement among all peoples, on the grounds that they have the primary interest in peace, stability, development, security and human rights regardless of their geographical location or national identity, with the aim of engaging untapped moral, intellectual and political energies *in the service of the peace process through all* available means, whether through the media or organised political action.

The intellectuals who took part in formulating the Copenhagen Declaration sought to create an international popular alliance that, as it gains momentum, will monitor and pressure governments that attempt to evade negotiations or to otherwise violate the internationally accepted rules and principles upon which they are based.

It was essential for this alliance, given the logic of such an enterprise, to formulate certain commonly-held standards *to guide the movement itself and to evaluate the actions* of the governments concerned in terms of their performance in negotiations and their actual policies. After lengthy dialogues at regional and international levels, the participants in Copenhagen were able to issue what has been termed "The Copenhagen Declaration: The International Alliance for an Arab-Israeli Peace." The participants wanted to ensure that the declaration clearly delineates two types of standards.

The first set involves a precise definition of the binding rules, principles and terms of reference for the negotiating processes between *governments. Their performance in accordance* to this definition is to be monitored by this alliance. Our criteria were: the Madrid formula, based on the principle of land for peace; UN Security Council resolutions 242 and 338, as well as Resolution 425 pertaining to Lebanon; the Oslo Accords concluded between the government of Israel, the PLO and the Palestinian National Authority (PNA).

The second set of standards is based on principles which *the alliance deems important in gauging the* progress of the intricate and complex peace process, whether in its current phase, so tangibly fraught with danger, or in the foreseeable future. These principles are summarised in the ten points which follow:

1. The Palestinian issue is at the heart of the Arab-Israeli conflict and a Palestinian-Israeli peace is the fundamental key to an Arab-Israeli peace.

2. The Palestinian people have the right to self-*determination and to create a national state* in accordance with international law.

3. Jerusalem *is of particular religious, cultural and political* importance for all parties to the conflict. The question of Jerusalem, therefore, merits particular attention in the final negotiations, in a manner that will fulfil the demands and aspirations of all parties regarding the future status of that city.

4. The government of Israel, while negotiations are in progress, should halt all construction of any new settlements and cease confiscation of privately or publicly owned Palestinian land until the status of all currently existing settlements has been determined in the negotiations over the *final settlement.*

5. All agreements ratified between the Palestinians and Israelis *must be implemented* in full, in text and *in spirit*, and special efforts should be devoted to normalising and improving the everyday life of the Palestinian people.

6. The government of Israel and the PNA should attempt to arrive at a just agreement during the final phase of negotiations by 5 May 1999, as stipulated in the Oslo accords. This agreement should cover the six fundamental issues still pending: Jerusalem, the settlements, borders, refugees, security and water.

7. The governments of *Israel* and Syria should resume negotiations on the basis of land for peace, UN Security *Council Resolutions 242* and 338, *mutual security* arrangements and normal relations. The resumption of negotiations is essential *in light of the fact that the current* freeze threatens to unleash renewed violence in the region.

8. UN Security Council Resolution 425 pertaining to occupied Lebanese territories should be implemented.

9. Maximum degrees of mutual security should be guaranteed to every nation and citizen in the region against acts of violence and terrorism, regardless of the source.

10. Any peace which is to be stable and lead to co-*existence and regional cooperation demands that the area* be free of all weapons of mass destruction and their de*livery systems. The appropriate steps* to *achieve* this should begin as soon as possible.

Because we are in the process of building a multi-party international alliance, the declaration, inclusive of the above-mentioned standards, has been jointly formulated by regional and international participants as a common platform reflecting their collective vision and plan of action toward achieving a just and comprehensive *peace.* Without such a common ground, it would be impossible *to create an international alliance of this sort. As such,* the declaration is not devoted to the demands of a single party, whether Arab or Israeli. *It is an agenda,* not a treatise promoting the national demands of a particular side.

The fundamental idea behind this alliance is to bring together intellectuals belonging to the various parties engaged in conflict, so that they may discuss the possibility of founding an internationally based movement. Regional and international circumstances and events proved auspicious: events have brought about the objective shift in the Middle East conflict from periodic, comprehensive *military confrontation to political negotiation. The arena* has thus become propitious for forging an alliance that, through an organisational mechanism operating within the framework of specifically determined standards, would work toward mobilising the energies of the peoples of the world alongside the peaceful popular forces who are directly involved in order to compel the governments *involved to reach an internationally guaranteed* just and comprehensive agreement. Such a dynamic has long been *lacking* and this *is precisely what the Copenhagen* conference managed to accomplish.

In its cruder form, the origins of the Copenhagen meeting date back to the eighties, in the wake of Camp David. It was at this point that the Peace Now movement was formed in Israel in order to counter opposition both inside Israel and in the Arab world, and in Egypt in particular. *In a rally staged by the Peace Now Movement*, an Israeli writer, Amos Alon, appealed to the forces of peace in Egypt and the Arab world to meet *with the forces* of peace in Israel in order to engage in a dialogue regarding *the realisation of a comprehensive pace.* No one in Egypt or the Arab world answered his call at the time, with the exception of Naguib Mahfouz , who represented only a very small minority of Arab public opinion. The overwhelming majority, including myself, stood entrenched in the opposite camp. With the sweep of regional and international changes that brought about the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Gulf War, the Madrid conference and the subsequent negotiations that engendered the Oslo agreement of 1993, a large segment of Egyptian and Arab intellectuals, including myself, have moved toward a new *conception of the conflict and its current and future* trajectories.

In *this context*, European and American *institutes* and research centres acted to encourage unpublicised meetings between Arab, and primarily Egyptian, intellectuals and their Israeli counterparts in order to investigate the possibilities for fostering meetings between Arabs and Israelis. I, like many others, refused to participate in these meetings precisely because they were to be held secretly, even though we considered them of substantial importance and had no cause whatsoever to doubt the integrity and patriotism of those who did participate.

It was not long before a number of Arab research in*stitutes* began a *similar endeavour, holding numerous* seminars at the national and Arab level. These meetings, which were publicised, did not include Israeli participants although they did include European and American Jews. Their purpose was to discuss a peaceful solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict and the role intellectuals could contribute play to that end; the discussions gave rise to publications treating these issues from numerous perspectives. None of these efforts gave rise to anything concrete and the notion of encouraging contact between intellectuals remained for some time at a purely theo*retical level.*

The transformation of the idea into a practical reality began on the initiative of a group of European intellectuals, from Denmark in particular. Prime among these were the efforts of Herbert Pundik, an influential European writer and journalist who, from the outset was frank about his Jewish background. Pundik upheld the right of Israel to a secure and stable existence, but he also said that the Palestinian people had the right to an independent state. *His son*, Ron Pundik, worked *alongside* the Norwegian and Swedish academics who had laid the *groundwork for the Palestinian-Israeli talks in Oslo.* Eventually Pundik and his European colleagues received the sponsorship of the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In its first phases, the initiative aimed to gauge the opinions of a number of Egyptian intellectuals — 26 ac*cording to my knowledge* — through a series of informal visits which Pundik made to Cairo. Frequently, he made these visits alone, although on other occasions he came with the *head of the Danish Foreign Ministry's Office of* Relations with the Arab world, Israel and Latin America. *At other times*, he was accompanied by the Israeli writer Amos Alon, one of the founders of the Peace Now organisation, or with David Kimche, formerly secretary-general of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and before that a senior Mossad official, who is now the director of the Council of International Relations, a non-governmental research institute.

During one of these visits, *I* and several *other Egyptian* intellectuals met Alon, who expressed his concern that *the advocates of peace in* Israel were at *risk* of becoming isolated and divided, since they had received no positive response from the Arabs. The Israeli right at the time was vehemently opposed to any political settlement. Pundik and Alon asked us whether or not we thought the time propitious, particularly now that a Palestinian authority had been established, to organise a dialogue that in effect would be a gathering of Egyptian and *Israeli intellectuals.* The dialogue would be at the invitation of Denmark, as a *country with no previous involvement* in the conflict. The purpose of gathering these intellectuals, in their purely private capacity, they said, would be to ascertain the possibility of reaching an understanding over a form of joint effort that would propel the peace process forward and safeguard the peace process. Eventually, they added, the dialogue would expand to include Arab intellectuals from other countries.

A group of Egyptian intellectuals agreed. The Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs therefore issued invitations to Mohamed Sid-Ahmed, Ahmed Fakhr, Mona Makram Ebeid and myself to meet Amos Alon, David Kimche and two other Israeli scholars. The meeting was held from 29 *September to 2 October 1995 in the offices of the* Museum of Louisiana, located 40 kilometres from Copenhagen. The dialogue was *chaired* by Pundik as the representative of Danish intellectuals and attended by two observers from the Danish Foreign Ministry.

Pundik opened the meeting with the suggestion that Mohamed Sid-Ahmed present the Egyptian point of view, after which David Kimche would present the Israeli viewpoint. In the course of the ensuing discussions it became evident that, although all present agreed upon the necessity of a comprehensive settlement as an alternative to war, there still existed a broad gap between the various conceptions of the participants. Clearly, one such meet*ing would not be sufficient. We agreed to hold four more* such meetings. It was also decided that the composition of the Egyptian and Israeli teams would differ with the exception of one individual from each — myself and David Kimche — who would attend all four sessions. Our Danish hosts agreed to fulfil the request submitted by the Egyptian participants to invite Palestinian, Jordanian, Syrian and Lebanese intellectuals to attend. I informed a number of Palestinian leaders and intellectuals of what had transpired in the first meeting.

The participants decided that the substance of the di*alogue, dubbed* the Louisiana *Initiative*, would be *made* public. Pundik offered to issue a press release summarising the discussions. It was agreed that neither this précis nor any of the participants would attribute any statements to any individual by name.

The second Louisiana Initiative meeting was held from 10 to 11 February 1996. The Egyptian participants included Mohamed El-Sayed Said, deputy director of the Centre for Political and Strategic Studies at Al-Ahram; *Gamal Abdel-Gawad, a researcher at the same centre; Dr* Samiha Fawzi, professor of economics at Cairo Uni*versity; and myself. The four Israeli participants included* Dan Meridor, a lawyer and former minister of justice, and a member of the Likud Party, recently appointed minister of finance.

If, on account of the presence of Dan Meridor in particular, the exchange in this session was more heated than that of the previous session, Meridor did admit at the end that he had learned much that *he had* been unaware *of* before and that he would convey his newly acquired knowl*edge of the Egyptian-Arab* perspective and *philosophy* of peace to his colleagues in the Likud. Shimon Peres who had been serving as prime minister at the time *following* the assassination of Rabin, had just announced that he would hold early elections. Finally, Pundik declared that he had contacted several Palestinian and Jordanian intellectuals who had agreed to participate in the Louisiana Initiative. He said that he had found it difficult to contact Syrian and Lebanese intellectuals, on the other hand, and *that those he did manage to contact had not responded to* his invitation. Nevertheless, he added that he would continue his efforts via other channels, such as the European Union.

The third session of the dialogue was scheduled to be held in the second week of June 1996. Prior to this date — on 13 May 1996 — the Egyptian participants informed our Danish hosts that we would not attend on the grounds that the Louisiana Initiative had reached a dead end in *light of the unanticipated flare-up of Israeli violence* and hostility that occurred shortly before the Israeli elections. After that time, the Danish and European sponsors attempted to prevail upon Egyptian, Palestinian and Jordanian intellectuals in order to resume the series of dialogues which had been broken off. It was our opinion that, if the Louisiana Initiative was to be rescued, it would have to follow an entirely different course and we submitted our recommendations toward that end. What that course was to be is the subject of the next article.

Reflections By Hani Shukrallah — Variations on a theme

"Show us your tattoo," orders the heavily made-up, impeccably chic female TV presenter and her soberly-suited, well-coiffed, smug male counterpart. The young prisoner, head shaven by, I strongly suspect, an agency other than his own, or for that matter, the Devil's, docilely complies, taking off his shirt and presenting a tattooed upper arm to his TV interrogators and their camera. Her face pinched in appropriate disapproval, the chic presenter admonishes: "Don't you know that you are violating God's ordinances by disfiguring His creation in this way?"

The young man, who could have pointed out to his inquisitor that there are those, in this country and outside it, who would consider her make-up and dress a much more serious violation of what God has ordained, did not do so, however. While obviously baffled by the charge of "Devil worshipping" — his two TV inquisitors seemed barely able to refrain from putting him to tests of water and fire to prove his innocence — he was more than willing to concede having sinned on this and practically every other count.

Self-styled arbiters of God's laws as interpreted by Egyptian officialdom, and more specifically Egyptian state television, the two inquisitors were thrown into total confusion, however, when the young prisoner insisted that not just "heavy metal" — which the Egyptian media and security bodies have uncovered as a fiendish plot to corrupt our youth and send them "head-banging" into the arms of Satan — but *all* music was sinful.

In fact, the youth said, anything that diverts a person from invoking the name of God is sinful. "Who told you this?" the two TV authorities barked in unison. "The sheikhs," answered the young man after some hesitation. Torn between their initial response of firmly denying "such nonsense" — after all, their mega-organisation has been damned in countless Friday sermons, during the past twenty years, as a principal source of sinfulness, licentiousness and immorality — and, I suspect, the dawning recognition that "the sheikhs" in question may have been the very same sheikhs whom the Interior Ministry had brought in to lecture the kids in prison, the two presenters presented a comic sight.

Indeed, one of the main features of the crisis of ideological hegemony during the past two decades has been the *inability of the state to demarcate between "official" and* "unofficial" religious discourses.

***

Official ("state") sheikhs — with the full paraphernalia of prime-time TV and radio programmes, newspaper columns, Friday sermons to tens of thousands at prominent mosques, lectures to "deviant" Islamists in prison, widely distributed tapes, etc. — have been turning, with a fair degree of regularity, into "unofficial" sheikhs, stripped of the trappings of officialdom and, on occasion, consigned to prison. One such state sheikh had been renowned for his anti-Coptic harangues until *Rose El-Youssef* weekly magazine published extracts from his taped sermons. Eventually, the official sheikh turned unofficial, was banned from TV, and later from the large Cairo mosque where he used to deliver the Friday sermon to huge crowds.

This star sheikh and others like him, many of whom neither stars nor sheikhs, but all similarly fat with the cream *of this and other lands, have for years* been setting the stage for the kind of brutal and senseless massacres that the *desperate, fanatical and destitute* Islamist militants of Upper Egypt have been committing *against equally destitute Copts during* the past few years. According to Egyptian human rights groups, last week's massacre in Abu Qurqas brings up the number of innocent Copts senselessly murdered by Islamists since 1992 to over 100.

This is not then an "aberration" that can be shrugged off merely as the work of "foreign" states and bodies, out to subvert "Egypt's role". The muted coverage by the bulk of the media of last week's massacre will not undo the fact that it took place — it merely gives the impression that, in the eyes of much of the Egyptian media, Egyptian lives are cheap, while fostering the climate that gave rise to this, and previous, massacres. There is, indeed, something eminently absurd and short sighted about a nation dealing with its fundamental problems with an eye on the foreign tourist market, on the next season.

In this space last week I wrote *that hypocrisy,* which often takes the form of 'public secrets', and *blood-lust were twin symptoms of a crisis of* ideological hegemony. I had no idea that this argument *would be illustrated so soon, and to such* devastating effect.

Mastersingers are best

David Blake on daisies and mudpies

Cairo Symphony Orchestra: Great Symphonies IV; Rossini, The Barber of Seville Overture; Mendelssohn Concerto in E minor Violin and Orchestra: Soloist Hassan Sharara; Dvorak Symphony No 8 in G major op 88; Conductor Charles Ansbacher; Cairo Opera House, Main Hall, 15 Feb

Hassan Sharara is one of the sights of Cairo. Whatever his academic or pedagogic qualities may be, as a violinist and concert artist he is unique here in delivering regularly for the city's concert audiences performances of great fascination. There is nothing about him that suggests the bored concert artist treading the well-worked circuit. He is not the statuesque, catatonic slumber type — pompous, stuck up, delivering a sibylline utterance for our amazement, but only if we are good.

He is wide awake, in there, totally professional, with a no-nonsense appeal, doing what he does best. And his best is the best, something of which he is rightly proud. That's his appeal.

He comes from a long line of musicians, knows everything about what he does, is a perfect craftsman and loves the job. But he can put out the ultimate gesture, musically, when required, then stand back from it, polishing it admiringly. There you have Hassan Sharara. Generous, giving, on top of the music, and always with that little extra flair which wonderful players must have. Their ability to show-off, present themselves, is their right and entitlement.

Sharara makes an occasion. The Cairo Symphony Orchestra with Charles Ansbacher was in powerful form. They preferred depth and darkly glowing notes. Plenty of brass is needed in the Mendelssohn, and in spite of the odd fluff, they kept the very Germanic sound, full of physical élan, going strongly.

So how many times have you heard the dear Mendelssohn E minor played. Everyone who can scrape a fiddle gets through it. Child prodigies ogle us from within its soft-flowery passages, old violin lions hurl it at us. The academies insist upon it. And oh, here it is again, on the programme. Sharara will do it yet again. Vain hope he will one day give the Sibelius concerto. Patience.

So here comes a gentle opening of the E minor concerto. Felix Mendelssohn was himself a Berlin prodigy, a treasure, but he never — history reports — ogled an audience. Neither does Sharara. He is a large, imposing man, handsomely straight-forward, rather like a rugby player in a charge. Do not get in his way. And so the E minor began yet again, and Hassan has the ball. It cannot be said this concerto is an old war horse, more a flower show prize exhibit. Lady violinists, gender-conscious, always over-deliver the muscle. It fails.

And here is Sharara, standing there like Hans Sachs, a smile lurking, some irony visible as he begins effortlessly to deliver the opening statements, so velvet, so soft, so completely Mendelssohn, so beginning-of-the-nineteenth century. This melody, this approach, opened new doors into untried territory. It is not flowers Sharara sees in the music, it is this newness, the shine on an instrument that would carry a bright light into the next century. We are not in a salon, rather a workshop or a laboratory. The violin slips into a meditative area and the player explores this with touching reverence, but never sentimentality.

And so comes the build-up through rushes of bowing and virtuoso fingering to the final fortissimo. Sharara loves a good flourish. Sheer physicality is one of his fortes. He bends and twists, rather like a dancer, light-footed, light-armed, finger accurate. The orchestra pushes him to extremes, low to highest falsetto, but he is always there where he should be, giving the orchestra his lead. Effortless assurance, rather parental, don't interrupt.

In the andante, middle section, is the place where the roses grew deep, deep crimson. But not here. More a pause to take a few deep breaths before attaining the speeds of the closing sections.

Sharara has a deep contralto tone to his range but he never abuses it. He never hoots. Good singers, like violinists, know where never to hoot. The angels always helped Mendelssohn to discover melodies rich and glowing, and there are some in the slow parts of this concerto. The playing had no mannerisms or catches of the throat. As the movement came to an end the violin flew to its top, over the orchestra, stayed there, shining bright and brave, always visible, like a night star.

Shakespeare's Puck flutters about in the concluding movement. It is here Sharara seems, in spite of his commanding presence, to be most at home. He adores, with almost childish glee, to go quickly. Nothing impedes him. He sets a cruel pace, and once or twice raced past the orchestra. He has the hands. But which of the two is most assured, left or right? He has the wit — there's always time for a positively lightening dot or dashing accent to the music.

What are such violinists for? Pleasure. Sharara gives this. He exudes happiness. Without being dull or didactic, he enjoys exploring the flip side of music. His position in this is strong. All the arts are on the slip. Painting is stuck in the doldrums, slaughtered by technology. Music feeds on technology. Such players as Sharara are aware of this, explore it, and so all doors fly open to them.

After this exhibition, the 8th Symphony of Dvorak fell flat. Anyway, it is a flat fish in shallow waters. None of the heart of the "Home" symphony shows. And it lacks the depth and majesty of the 9th (The New World Symphony). So conductor and orchestra made the most of the pretty melodies and Slavonic rhythms which abound. Dvorak knew the value of these two elements in sustaining both what seemed like a flagging inspiration in this symphony and the lack of visuals characteristic of even his best music.

So we have the river-side swirls of sound gushing up and down through almost three movements. The Cairo Symphony Orchestra, which had begun this concert with a pleasant, unusually dark-toned version of Rossini's *Barber of Seville* overture, gave the 8th Symphony a darker side. One movement, flowers and garlands flying about in the blue, then dark, ominous clouds. Probably the future of the twentieth century which Dvorak expressed so often in his music. These qualities are around in the 8th but never reach full presentation.

Slav melodies always seduce, and we get plenty. We had also a first rate performance from the orchestra. And we also had, as an audience devoted to Dvorak, a slap in the face with the brassy, vulgar, pointless ending the composer tacks onto the end of the piece. Roses, daisies and the river — then the mud-pie, right in the face.

Cinema

A com icon

Hani Mustafa finds that Adel Imam's latest film, a sequel to *Bekhit wa Adila*, fits neatly in the unravelling of the pattern of the actor's career

Is it the sheer kudos attached to Adel Imam's name that has been drawing hundreds of thousands to cinemas screening *Bekhit wa Adila II*, subtitled *El-Gardal wal-Kanaka* (The Bucket and the Coffee Pot), his latest cinematic outing? The film is, after all, a sequel to *Bekhit wa Adila*, one of the biggest box-office hits of the past decade.

Since the late seventies Adel Imam has depended on two criteria in selecting his films and evolving his cinematic persona. The films in which he first gained popularity combined comedy and action, a genre exemplified by *Ragab Fawq Safih Sakhin* (Ragab on a Hot Tin Roof) and *Shaaban Taht El-Sifr* (Shaaban Under Zero Line). From the beginning of the eighties, however, Imam started to choose films with an overt political and social content, though the roles he selected always showcased his unique gift for comedy, a trend exemplified by *Hub fi Al-Zinzana* (Love in the Prison Cell) and *El-Ghoul* (The Ghoul). Indeed, the censorship department objected to the ending of the latter film, in which Imam's character kills the corrupt Farid Shawqi and the film was only released after the ending had been re-edited.

Imam, nevertheless, continued to espouse political issues, and it seemed a natural extension of the path on which he had already embarked when he performed the play *El-Wad Sayed El-Shaghal* (Sayed the Servant Boy) in Assiut, at that time a bastion of extremism. And later, of course, he was to score yet another box-office hit in *El-Irhabi* (The Terrorist). Scripted by Lenin El-Ramli and directed by Nader Galal (the same team responsible for*Bekhit wa Adila*), *El-Irhabi*'s crude treatment of terrorism, while it disappointed the critics, confirmed Imam's emerging persona as being both anti-fundamentalist and critical of the establishment.

Hitherto, though, Imam has kept the two veins — comedy/action, on the one hand, and the politically loaded, on the other — separate. But in *Bekhit wa Adila II* the two veins merge as the sequel takes the earlier, conventional adventures of the two heroes and re-casts them in a political context as they stand in parliamentary elections.

The script attempts to provide a motive for Bekhit and Adila's decision to stand for parliament while preserving their viability as exemplars of ordinary Egyptians. They enter the elections in the hope of procuring one of the flats at the disposal of MPs so they can get married rather than sneak kisses on the Corniche, a course of action that had earlier ended in their arrests. But then the scenario skims over their search for a flat, presumably because the comic potential of the search does not match the infinite possibilities for caricature that elections hold.

Despite the change in tenor *Bekhit wa Adila II* repeats many of the successful comic effects of its predecessor. The two characters' brawling, which had so amused the audience of the first film, are repeated here: furniture is hurled, the sound of breaking glass echoes everywhere, and sets end up in a terrible mess. Likewise, with some of the punch-lines delivered by Mohamed Heneidi, one gets a sense of déjà vu. Another throw-back to part one comes at the end of the sequel when Bekhit and Adila are elected to parliament and find among their fellow-parliamentarians three members of the gang that featured in the first film.

The sequences of events hardly gels dramatically, though a redeeming feature was, surprisingly, provided by the often farcical comedy. And though some of the gags were trite, Imam's ability to elicit laughter from an audience testifies to his iconic status. In the end, it was not the joke that made them laugh, but the fact that Imam was delivering it. Talented comedian though Heneidi is, his career is shorter than Imam's, and so the audience could not overlook the fact that many of his lines were contrived.

The film also marks a return to the screen for comedian Said Saleh who sports a red scarf, is a communist, and delivers lines in Marxist jargon. It is a mildly funny caricature. A far less palatable secondary character, however, is Bekhit's young friend, and the comedy eked out of his slight mental handicap could not be more politically incorrect.

Yet leaving the cinema it is impossible not to acknowledge that a considerable amount of daring had gone into tackling social and political issues, and for this *Bekhit wa Adila II* should be lauded.

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Mervat Refaat (Pastels)
Ramsis Hilton, pool level, 1115 Corniche El-Nil. 10am-2pm & 5pm-9pm. 20 Feb.

Marilyn Batte (Paintings)
Opera House Gallery, Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 342 0589. Daily 10am-1.30pm & 4.30pm-8.30pm. Until 25 Feb.

Jan Sibik (Photographs)
Ewart Gallery, Main Campus, AUC, El-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5436. Daily exc Fri 9am-7pm. Until 26 Feb.

Latin American Paintings
Cervantes Institute for Spanish Culture, 20 Boulos Hanna St, Dokki. Tel 360 1746. Daily exc Sat & Sun, 10am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 28 Feb.

Reda Abdel-Salam (Paintings)
Extra Gallery, 3 El-Nessim St, Zamalek. Tel 340 6293. Daily exc Sun, 10am-2pm & 6pm-10pm. Until 28 Feb.

Video Visions Cairo 2
El-Hanager, Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily 9am-9pm. Until 1 March.
Installations and video works by Marie José Burki, Christoph Draeger, Simon Lammière, Ahmed Hassouna, Fares Abdel-Kareem, Hassan Khan and Mohamed Abla, among others.

Sherif Abdel-Badie (Paintings)
Espace Gallery, 1 El-Sherifein St, Downtown. Tel 393 1699. Daily exc Fri, 10am-2pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 6 March.

Mohamed Abdel-Moneim (Drawings & Watercolours)
Mashrabiya Gallery, 8 Champollion St, Downtown. Tel 578 4494. Daily 11am-8pm. Until 6 March.

Hoda El-Ghaiaty
French Cultural Centre, Heliopolis Annex, 27 Sabri Abu Alam St, Ismailia Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 417 4824. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 10am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. 23 Feb-6 March.
Oil paintings under the title "Orient and Occident."

Margo Veillon (Self portraits)
Cairo Berlin Gallery, 17 Youssef El-Guindi St, Bab El-Louk. Tel 393 1764. Daily exc Sun, 12pm-8pm. Until 8 March.
To mark the artist's ninetieth birthday, a collection of self portraits from throughout her long career.

Peggy Crawford (Photographs)
Sony Gallery, Main Campus, AUC, El-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5422. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-12pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 27 March.
The artist's 34 coloured photographs, including houses, villages, temples, doors, façades, huts and mosques, built of mud, reeds, coral and stone portray the Yemeni traditional architecture built of the earth.

Fares Abdel-Kareem

The Museum of Mr and Mrs Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil
1 Kafour El-Akhshid St, Dokki. Tel 336 2376. Daily exc Mon, 10am-6pm.
Egypt's largest collection of nineteenth century European art, amassed by the late Mahmoud Khalil and his wife, includes works by Courbet, Van Gogh, Gauguin, and Rodin and a host of impressionist works, housed in the villa once belonging to the Khalils and converted into a museum with little, if any, expense spared. There are also a number of excellent Orientalist works.

FILMS

French Films
French Cultural Centre, Mounira Annex, 1 Madraset El-Hoqouq El-Ferensiya St, Mounira. Tel 354 7679.
Farrebique (1946): directed by Georges Rouquier, starring the inhabitants of Farrebique. *23 Feb, 7pm.*
Les Disparus de Saint Agile (1938): directed by Christian-Jacques, starring Michel Simon, Eric Von Stroheim and Aime Clariond. *24 Feb, 7pm.*

Italian Films
Italian Cultural Institute, 3 El-Sheikh El-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791.
La Caduta Degli Dei (1969): Directed by L Visconti. *22 Feb, 6pm.*
Padre Padrone (1977): directed by Paolo and Vittorio Taviani. *23 Feb, 8pm.*

Bekhit wa Adila II: El-Gardal Wel-Kanaka (Bekhit And Adila II: The Bucket and The Coffee Pot)
Rivoli I, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Roxy, Roxy Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0344. Daily 10am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 5726. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. MGM, Kolleyat El-Nasr Sq, Maadi. Tel 352 3066. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Metro, 35 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 393 3897. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. El-Haram, El-Haram St, Giza. Tel 385 8358. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. El-Horreya I, El-Horreya Mall, Roxy, Heliopolis. Daily 1pm, 6pm & 9pm. Ramsis Hilton I, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight. Radio, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Cosmos I, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Diana Palace, 17 El-Alfi St, Emadeddin, Downtown. Tel 924 727. Daly 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
Starring Adel Imam and Sherine.

Imra'a Fawq El-Qemma (A Woman At The Top)
Normandy, 31 El-Ahram St, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0254. Daily 12.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Tiba I, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Sphinx, Sphinx Sq, Mohandessin. Tel 346 4017. Daily 8pm. Karim I, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 924 830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Miami, 38 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 574 5656. Daily noon, 3.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm. New Odeon II, 4 Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm.
With Nadia El-Guindi.

Hallaq Housh
Cosmos II, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Cairo Sheraton, El-Galaa St, Giza. Tel 360 6081. Daily 10.30am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm & midnight. Lido, 23 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 934 284. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
Starring Leila Eloui.

Hassan El-Loll
Rivoli II, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm 8pm & 10pm. Tiba II, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. New Odeon III, 4 Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm.
Starring Ahmed Zaki.

Jingle All the Way
Karim II, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 924 830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. El-Salam, 65 Abdel-Hamid Badawi St, Heliopolis. Tel 293 1072. Daily 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
Arnold Schwarznegger in yet another film for the kiddiwinks.

Maximum Risk
Ramsis Hilton II, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 330pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight. El-Horreya II, El-Horreya Mall, Roxy, Heliopolis. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, & 9pm. New Odeon I, 4 Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm.
Starring Van Damme.

The Glimmer Man
Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 5726. Thur & Sat, midnight.

Commercial cinemas change their programmes every Monday. The information provided is valid through to Sunday after which it is wise to check with the cinemas. Arabic films are seldom subtitled. For information, contact the venue.

MUSIC

Guitar Recital with Eight Strings
Cervantes Institute for Spanish Culture, 20 Boulos Hanna St, Dokki. Tel 360 1746. 23 feb, 8pm.
Music from the XVIII to the XX centuries performed by Joseph Henriquez.

Cairo Opera Children's Choir
Main Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 342 0589. 20 Feb, 2pm.
Conducted by Selim Sahab.

Piano and Violin Recital
Gomhouriya Theatre, Gomhouriya St. Tel 391 9956. 20 Feb, 9pm.
Performed by Johana Romi Nwi (Austria) and Alexander Austrovsky (Russia).

National Arabic Music Ensemble
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 20 Feb, 8pm.
Conducted by Selim Sahab.

Piano Concert
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 21 Feb, 8pm.
Alice Del Panta Michahelles performs compositions by Casella, Chopin, Brahms, Schumann and Mendelssohn.

Cairo Opera Orchestra
El-Gomhouriya Theatre, Gomhouriya St, Abdin. Tel 391 9956. 22 Feb, 9pm.

Cairo Symphony Orchestra
Main Hall, Opera House, as above. 22 Feb, 8pm.
Russian violonist Igor Oistrakh, conducted by Ahmed El-Saedi, performs compositions by Omar Khairat, Brahms and Beethoven.

Song and Harp Recital
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 23 Feb, 8pm.
Performed by Fathy Bedeir (tenor) and Manal Mohieddin (harp).

Stradivarius Violin and Piano Recital
Main Hall, Opera House, as above. 25 Feb, 8pm.
Pianist Massimo Lambertini and violinist Marco Fornaciari, who will perform on the priceless Stradivarius violin from Cremone, play compositions by Mendelssohn, Bach, Bazzini and Paganini.

Song Recital
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 25 Feb, 8pm.
Performed by the Cairo Opera Company.

Abdou Dagher Ensemble
Ewart Hall, Main Campus, AUC, El-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5436. 26 Feb, 8pm.
A concert with traditional Egyptian instruments.

DANCE

Le Corsaire
Main Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 342 0589. 20-24 Feb, 8pm & 24 Feb 11am.
Performed by the Cairo Opera Company.

THEATRE

The Last Scene of a Tragedy
French Cultural Centre, Heliopolis Annex, 27 Sabri Abu Alam St, Ismailia Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 417 4824. 26 & 27 Feb, 8pm.
This adaptation of Samuel Beckett's play is directed by Ossama Farouq and performed by the Eshraka Company.

The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde
Gomhouriya Theatre, Abdin. Tel 391 9956. 24-26 Feb, 9pm.
The Empty Space Theatre Company performs Robin Brook's stage adaptation of the novel by Robert Louis Stevenson.

Bahlool fi Istambul (Bahlool in Istambul)
Ramsis Hilton Theatre, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7435. Daily 10pm, Fri & Sun 8.30pm.

Hekmat Hanem... Almaz!?
George Abiad Hall, Ezbekiya Theatre, Ataba Sq. Tel 591 1267. Daily 10pm.

Dastoor Ya Siadna (With Your Permission, Masters)
El-Fann Theatre, Nadi El-Musiqa St, Ramsis. Tel 578 2444. Daily 8.30pm.

Ballo (Fanfare)
Madinet Nasr Theatre, Youssef Abbas St, Madinet Nasr. Tel 402 0804. Daily 8.30pm, Thur 10pm.
Starring Salah El-Saadani, directed by Samir El-Asfouri.

El-Ganzir (The Chain)
El-Salam Theatre, Qasr El-Aini. Tel 355 2484. Daily exc Mon, 9pm.

Ka'b 'Ali (High Heels)
Radio Theatre, 4 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 578 4910. Daily 8pm, Wed & Thur 10pm.

El-Zaim (The Leader)
El-Haram Theatre, Pyramids Road, Giza. Tel 386 3952. Daily 8.30pm, Wed & Thur, 10pm.

LECTURES

"Come To Me In My Fine Pavilion In This Happy Hour..." A Lecture on Birth Rituals in Ancient Egypt
Netherlands Institute for Archaeology and Arabic Studies, 1 Dr Mahmoud Azmi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 0076. 20 Feb, 5.30pm.
Lecture by Jana Loose, Leiden University.

A Reconsideration of the Economic History of the Middle East
Marriott Room (189), Main Campus, AUC, El-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5436. 22 Feb.
A seminar in the framework of "Individual and Society in the Muslim Mediterranean World", chaired by Prof Ali Barakat, Helwan University and Prof Robert Mabro, Oxford University.

First session, 11am-1pm:
The Rasaa'il Ikhwan El-Safa and the Controversy over the Origin of Guilds in the Medieval Islamic World by Abbas Hamdani, professor of Middle Eastern History, University of Wisconsin.
State and Economy in Five Mamelake Sources (in Arabic) by Emad Abu ghazi, Cairo University.
Second session, 2.30pm-5pm:
Trade in Registers of the Alexandria Court (in Arabic) by Mohamed El-Sayed Abdel-Raziq, MA candidate, Cairo University.
Ciflik and 'Uhd Under Mohamed Ali (in Arabic) by Isam Isawi, Cairo University.
The Private Papers of an Armenian Merchant Family in the Ottoman Empire, 1912-1914 by Armin Kredian, MA candidate, AUC.

Islam in Europe, A Comparison Between France and the UK
Netherlands Institute for Archaeology and Arabic Studies, 1 Dr Mahmoud Azmi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 0076. 23 Feb, 5.30pm.
Lecture by Prof Gilles Kepel, from the Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris.

Astronomy and Kingship in the Ramesseum
British Council, 192 El-Nil St, Agouza. Tel 301 0319. 24 Feb, 7pm.
Lecture by Cynthia May Sheikholeslam, American University in Cairo.

Arab Oil: The Weakness and The Glory
Jameel Centre Auditorium, Greek Campus, AUC, El-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 6373. 25 Feb, 4.30pm.
Lecture by Robert Mabro, director of the Oxford Institute for Energy Studies.

Calligraphic School in Modern Islamic Arts and Its Relevance to International Art Trends
Rare Books and Special Collections Library, AUC, corner of El-Sheikh Rihan and Mansour Sts. 26 Feb, 5pm.
Lecture by Princess Wegdan Ali of Jordan, distinguished visiting artist of the Performing and Visual Arts Department.

All information correct at time of going to press. However, it remains wise to check with venues first, since programmes, dates and times are subject to change at very short notice.
Please telephone or send information to Listings, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Galaa St, Cairo. Tel 5786064. Fax 5786089/833.

Compiled by **Injy El-Kashef**

Around the galleries

SURREALISM dominates the paintings by **Raafat Zaki Ibrahim** which are currently on show at the **Atelier du Caire**. Landscapes, social issues, human bodies, the tightly packed picture surface bursting with colour, all are charged by the artist's mystical vision.

Also on show at the Atelier are zinc engravings by **Ashraf Abbas El-Hady**. Though the compositions are complicated — tense, dynamic, mysterious, they consciously avoid anything that might appear fussy or overworked and as a consequence exhibit the artist's technical mastery of what is, in fact, a very difficult medium.

Reviewed by ***Nagwa El-Ashri***



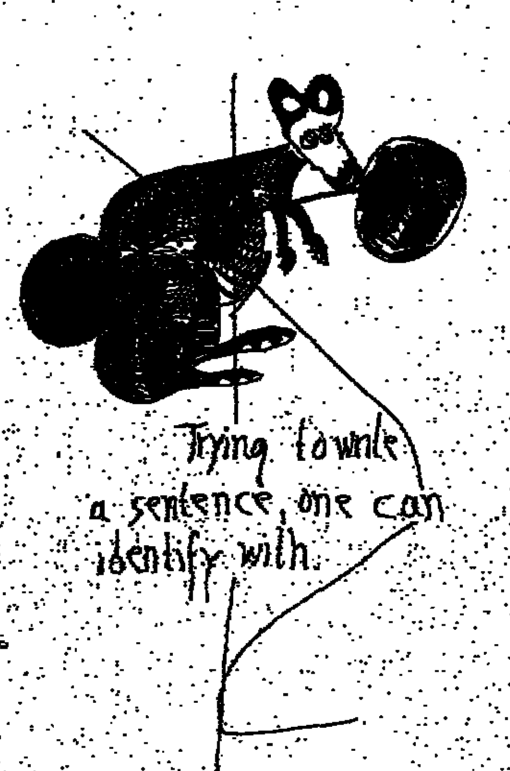
Ashraf Abbas El-Hady

Hypothetical research

The 6th Cairo International Biennale attracted a great deal of criticism. Perhaps, writes **Nigel Ryan**, this was inevitable, though it was not always measured, and was often far from fair







From top, clockwise: Piya Buangkhanthien from Thailand; Uli Aigner, from Austria, and the maxim to which the majority of artists at the 6th Cairo Biennale appeared to be aspiring, and Ahmed Morsi, Egyptian born artist now resident in New York, whose writings, accompanying the *Biennale*, provided a salutary reminder that the end of the millennium need not, necessarily, be the end of the world

Since it was first held in 1984, the Cairo International Biennale has been growing. That first event attracted artists from 12 countries, a number that has expanded, during subsequent biennales, until the most recent event — *the "Sixth International Biennale 1996"*, which strangely, given the title, continued for two months into 1997. Participants in the most recent Biennale came from 45 countries, and the event was accompanied, as has been the case since 1992, by an international symposium organised by the National Centre for Fine Arts.

The 6th Biennale was organised around the theme "universality between past and present" chosen, according to Farghali Abdel-Hafez, head of the Biennale Commissary, in part as a "spur to artists to contribute to creating timeless [works] conducive to launching a bridge linking the past to the future via spiritual orientations *injecting human sentiments into art works*". And though I am not wholly sure what this means exactly, the result occupied seven exhibition spaces around the city, including the Ministry of Culture's most prestigious galleries, the exhibition spaces at the National Cultural Centre and the Centre of Arts, Zamalek. Yet despite the obvious intention to convert the event into one of international standing the reception accorded to the Biennale by the local press was at best lukewarm, the general tenor of commentaries holding the line that contemporary practice can stray just a little too far, and when it does, authenticity becomes less easy to ascribe, albeit easier to deny.

Perhaps it is the very notion of "the bridge linking the past to the future" that lies at the bottom of the coolness of the reception accorded to the event since it is the past, and the question marks that the past seems almost inevitably to append to a verifiable authenticity, that continues to demarcate the perimeters of art historical discourse — if one can talk of such a thing — largely on the level of exclusion principle. Innovation, critics have suggested, can compromise the "Egyptianess" of the art produced locally, and that, necessarily, is a bad thing. To breach the limits of a national style is, apparently, impermissible, and what is needed now is a good old lesson in back to basics.

Only what are the basics? What, indeed, are the components of the national style that are being compromised by the activities of Egypt's contemporary artists? Certainly in terms of formulating a pictorial vocabulary there are no basics to get back to. There is not even a particularly strong tradition against which to rebel. And there exist, in any case, only a finite number of possible pictorial vocabularies, certainly at any given moment.

But that there was, in retrospect, something problematic *about the 6th Biennale appears undeniable, and* as might be expected this had both everything and nothing to do with timing. That the 1996 event should, in fact, have occupied the first two months of 1997, might serve as a convenient metaphor for the fairly consistent skewing of chronologies. That it should, with such fanfare, *have been announced by its organisers as an outlining of* the necessary strategies to see art safely into the 21st century — Ahmed Fouad Selim, president of the Biennale's concurrent symposium, states baldly that the event "confronts the exigency of poring over the coming four year passage to the obscure 21st century" — rather *begs the question of the subjects that the next Biennale*, still two years safely this side of the millennium, will tackle.

But millenniums do seem to be important, and not just to obscure sects and astrologers, and not just because apocalyptic visions of the end of the world have at least the virtue — a *somewhat dubious virtue, these days*, admittedly — of finality. They allow for the taking of positions, for the adoption of an overview.

There is a simple, fairly shocking fact: within three years the art of the twentieth century will cease to be contemporary. It will, in some significant way, begin to belong to another age. To point *that the millennium is itself* a fairly arbitrary construct — the year 2000 is, after all, a product of the Christian, Western calendar — is no more than to engage in a circular sophistry, at least in this context.

Modern art, *in its formal vocabularies, in its pictorial gambits, in its descriptions*, bears a single, indelible stamp, and the stamp reads Made In Europe. The borrowings that made the development of those vocabularies possible are by now well-known, and if Western art-historians have been patronising in the terms in which such borrowings are described, they must now, perforce, be more circumspect. *But the fact remains, as* Henry Hughes points out in an essay included in the volume published by the Biennale's International Symposium, that "early modernism bore the twin legacy of the Romantic movement: it was revolutionary, rather than evolutionary, but it was also regressive in its longing for a perfect wholeness."

Such a perfect wholeness, though, proved impossible to sustain, even if only as an unrealisable ambition. Within the particular conditions directing the activities of the avant-garde, and certainly by the mid-point of the 20th century, factionalism had become everything. The artist as magician, as a *dealer in absolute mysteries, had* proved a peculiarly vulnerable construct. The avant-garde was never immaculate, was always mired in its own, often petty concerns. And largely because it was so astute at propagating its own legends, the avant-garde was ripe for exploitation. The fifties were important. The manner in which the CIA conspired to promote abstraction, singling out works by the New York School as the ultimate expression of the individuality possible in American society, is now thoroughly documented, and with it the artist as super-hero finally withered to more human proportions.

And it was in this guise that the artist appeared at the 6th Cairo International Biennale, aware, however obscurely, of the dialectical nature of artistic production to the society supporting that production, aware that the innocence of pure form has long been compromised by far *from pure associations*. The false heroism of that earlier European modernism is long gone. It always was false, was always prefaced by an unsustainable idealism, but ironically remains sufficiently appealing to allow today's artists to stand accused of abandoning the project to formulate a truly national style in Egypt on its back.

Style is convention. Convention can, and will, be appropriated. In more human guise, though, and freed from the constraints to be ethnically pure — many artists, unlike many critics, have outgrown the rhetoric of crude nationalism — it is the artist who does the appropriation, the artist who picks and chooses, rather than being forced into the ignominious position of being forever "the conscience of the people", a position understandable, perhaps, in the 1950s, but far from tenable now.

To note that in a triptych by the prize winning Egyptian painter Shadi El-Nashoqati, included in the Biennale, the figure lying on the bed in the central panel seems to be a quotation drawn from a series of paintings based on the Camden Town murder by Walter Sickert would betray rather more about where I am coming from than any insight into the art work about which I am purporting to comment. *In a newspaper review it would be* questionable, even as description, *since few readers will* be familiar with the images that are being cited, and in writing, in a newspaper of all things, it is only reasonable to attempt to be as legible as possible.

Such a comment would, in the end, constitute little more than an attempt to fix Shadi El-Nashoqati within a traditional, art historical narrative. Certainly it can have little to do with intentions, since the links between El-Nashoqati, born in Egypt in 1971, and Sickert, a late Victorian who nonetheless managed to stagger through the first few decades of the 20th century, are far from clear. Should El-Nashoqati achieve the kind of celebrity that encourages art history students to make him the subject of their PhDs, however, then a great deal of time will be spent on discovering whether, indeed, El-Nashoqati was familiar with the work of Sickert, whether reproductions — should he not have been in a position to view the originals — were available in Cairo in the 1990s. And then, should it be verifiable that the figure was indeed drawn directly from Sickert, a great deal more time will be spent pondering the significance of El-Nashoqati's choosing as a model the subject of a series of studies of a murdered prostitute by a late Victorian English painter, which when they were first exhibited caused outrage in London's stuffy art world, and then selecting that painting to enter into the 1996 Cairo Biennale. Questions could then be asked about the manner in which the work was received, both by the selection panel — *perhaps here a post-doctoral* research grant might be needed — and the way in which it was reviewed in the newspapers of the day. And the conclusion of all this hypothetical research? That Shadi El-Nashoqati did not want to be "the conscience of the nation", that such an idea, indeed the very idea of a national style, might have struck him, in 1996, as fatuous.

One of the least apocalyptic pieces in the Symposium volume is by Ahmed Morsi. It begins thus: "Anyone who thinks that the world in the year 2001 will be different from the world as we know it now would be wrong."

Morsi, though, adds a coda: "As far as cultural matters are concerned...renewal takes place...simply through psychological motives that have their own mechanisms, that can propel the present into the future and in rare, though not impossible cases, retreat into the darkness of the past."

One of the least apocalyptic images included in the exhibition was by the Austrian artists Uli Aigner: a mouse, carrying a bar bell, above the words "trying to write a sentence one can identify with." Both are such obvious bits of common sense they sound banal. They are not.

Books

Bus loads to heritage

Mahmoud El-Wardani reviews a selection of significant titles to have appeared in Arabic over the previous month

• ***Masriyya* (*L'Egyptienne*), Fawzia Asaad. Cairo: Dar Al-Hilal, 1997**
The latest novel in the fiction series of Dar Al-Hilal is the long-overdue translation of Fawzia Asaad's novel *L'Egyptienne*, translated under the title *Masriyya*. The author, who obtained her PhD in philosophy from the Sorbonne, has been living in Geneva for over thirty years. In addition to *L'Egyptienne* (1975), Asaad has written two more novels in French that are yet to be translated into Arabic. Asaad's vocation as a novelist came about by chance. A friend of Asaad's who worked for a publishing house in France had sent her a letter commissioning her to write a novel that would describe the mores and customs of modern Egypt from the point of view of a woman. *L'Egyptienne* follows the life journey of a young Coptic woman between Egypt and Europe, taking in the changes that swept her native country towards the end of the '40s.

• ***Bass Al-Awadem* (The Bus of Humanfolk), Nagwa Barakat. Beirut: Dar Al-Adab, 1996**
This, the third novel by Lebanese writer Nagwa Barakat, is an enticing variation on the theme of the journey. The novel charts a bus journey through the Levant, exploring the microcosmic relationships that evolve among the passengers.

• ***Adabiyat Al-Ma'thour Al-Shaabi Fi Moulid Al-Sayed Ahmed Al-Badawi* (The Poetics of Popular Heritage as Seen in the Moulid of Al-Sayed Al-Badawi), Ibrahim Helmi. Cairo: Al-Haya Al-Aama Li Qusour Al-Thaqafa, 1996**
About two million people visit the *moulid* of Al-Sayed Al-Badawi every year, seeking the blessings and benefactions of this religious man who hailed from Fez in Morocco and settled in Egypt during the sixth century AH. Researcher Ibrahim Helmi compiled and examined the poetry written about Al-Sayed Al-Badawi, as well as carried out field work at the actual *moulid*, interviewing visitors and organisers. The result is a thoroughly informative and timely study.

• ***Al-Shafra Al-Wirathiya Lil-Insan* (The Code of Codes), ed Daniel J Keveles & Leroy Hood, tr Ahmed Mustagir. Kuwait: Silsilat Alam Al-Marifa, 1997**
With contributions from leading scientists in the field of genetics, this book leaves no aspect of so-called genetic engineering untouched. Apart from the scientific aspect of the issue, the articles cover such aspects as the legality and ethics of genetic engineering. Certainly a welcome addition to the Arabic library.

• ***Al-Shakhsiya Al-Misriya: Al-Tattawur Al-Nafsi Fi Khamsin Qarnan* (Egyptian Character: Its Psychological Development In 50 Centuries), Rafik Habib. Cairo: Markaz Al-Mahrousa, 1997**
Originally written as the author's PhD thesis, this book attempts to chart the constants and variables in Egyptian identity from 3,000 BC to the 1970s. While Habib considers Ancient Egyptian cultural *features to be a cornerstone of our identity, he* claims that both the Greek and Roman eras left no trace. As to the admixture of Egyptian and Arabic culture, he explains this by advancing the argument that Arabic culture came from the same cultural roots as the Pharaonic.

• ***'Alam Sophia* (The World of Sophia), Justen Gaarder, tr Ahmed Lutfi. Damascus: Dar Yarub Lil-Dirasat Wal-Nashr, 1996**
This is essentially a "philosophy-made-simple" book by a Norwegian *school teacher of philosophy, written in* the form of a novel. Targeted towards younger readers, the book charts Western philosophy from the Greeks all the way to the twentieth century, taking in, en route, the influence of modern science on philosophy. Editions have already appeared in most European languages, with the volume becoming the surprise publishing success story of the past few years.

• ***Al-Karmal*, Editor-in-Chief Mahmoud Darwish. Ramallah: Muasasat Al-Karmal Al-Thaqafiya, 1997**
Temporarily discontinued after its 49th edition, *Al-Karmal* literary journal has now been relaunched. The 50th edition includes studies by Nasr Hamed Abu Zeid, Faisal Darraj, Sabri Hafez, Sobhi Hadidi and Qazem Gehad. *Another section* includes writings by poets and novelists such as Liana Badr, Mahmoud Darwish, Mourid Bargouthi and Saadi Youssef.

• ***Mawaqif Naqdia Min Al-Turath* (Critical Positions towards Heritage), Mahmoud Amin El-Alim. Cairo: Dar Qadaya Fikriya, 1997**
In his introduction to the book, Mahmoud Amin El-Alim explains that his position vis-à-vis heritage is not one of rejection or belittlement. Rather, the book emerges from a desire to encourage rational, critical re-*assessments of heritage and religious texts*, which would set them in their historical and social context. Whereas elsewhere El-Alim has written about his own stance on the subject of heritage, here he studies the positions of other critics and scholars, among them Nasr Hamed Abu Zeid, Hassan Hanafi, Abdel-Rahman Badawi, Zaki Naguib Mahmoud, Abdullah Al-Nadim and Taha Hussein.

Plain Talk

The 7th Festival of Films for Children will take place from 23 February to 2 March. So, once more, the big top is in town, and Egyptian children will be presented with the valuable opportunity of watching recent releases from the 21 countries which are participating in the festival. The festival has become a tradition. Yet after seven years, great efforts are still being made on the part of the festival management to secure for young Egyptian audiences the best films made specifically for their age group. And of course, the demands of that age group are forever changing. There is, whatever we might like to think, nothing static in childhood.

Indeed this is a phenomenon worthy of study and research which could well be undertaken on the widening chasm between a child's physical growth and his or her intellectual maturity. Thanks to television, computer and now Internet, children of the world seem to be united in an accelerated process of intellectual growth. This incredible advance in communication has revolutionised the world. Until recently, the main task of the teacher, for instance, was to convey information to the pupils. Now the job has become more complicated; answers have to be given to all kinds of questions which result from the children's exposure to more complicated lives as well as to an ever widening range of ideas and perceptions now easily available thanks to modern technology. Some countries have tried to solve this problem by organising courses for teachers in science, while some of them let the teachers share the same class with the pupils.

But let us go back to the festival. This year's 21 countries are taking part with 87 films, 18 features, 7 shorts, 16 animated and 4 television programmes. The countries taking part include Canada, India, Austria, Hungary, France, China, Ireland, Turkey, Croatia, Egypt, Belgium, Finland, US, Azerbaijan, Australia, Syria and Saudi Arabia.

As usual, the festival offers a number of prizes: golden, silver and bronze for feature films. Similar prizes are given for animated films, short films and television programmes. Besides this, there are prizes given by the jury for films made for television as well as a special prize given by the children's jury.

The Arab Council for Childhood and Development has provided, as is now customary, the usual LE100,000 to finance the prizes for the best films from Arab countries. In this respect one must mention the great contribution of this council, under the chairmanship of Prince Talal Ibn Abdel-Aziz, in organising the competition for the selection of the best Arab cartoon of the year. A committee of experts in children's culture, examined over 200 entries and, while the first prize was withheld the second and the third were both awarded. It is expected that the winning cartoons will be screened in different Arab countries, in the hope of kick-starting the local production of animated films.

As in previous years the international jury is headed by Cathy Ranudy, president of the Children and Youth Section of the Hungarian International Centre for Children's Films. And according to the viewing committee there are a number of excellent films, both in and out of competition, maintaining or even surpassing the standard of earlier events.

This is the happy side of the festival. One thing, however, which is disappointing is the reduction in the number of Arab countries participating in this year's festival. Only three Arab countries will be taking part this year, which seems a great pity.

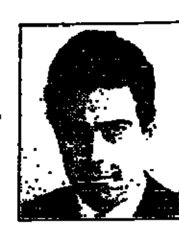
The reduction in the number of Arab participants of course must raise questions about the state of Arab film industries, particularly when it comes to addressing a younger audience. No Arab country has yet to produce a full length feature aimed primarily at a young audience. Yet the festival is continuing in its laudable endeavours to promote such productions, and hopefully we will soon see some positive results.

In his press conference to announce the opening of the event, Saadeddin Wahba, president of the festival, deplored the fact that no Arab country has as yet taken heed of the efforts of the festival to engage *in the production of films* directed specifically at children. It is noteworthy that the Union of Arab Artists, the organisation responsible for the festival, held a competition for the best scenarios for children's films. The winning entries were sent to the Ministry of Culture and the Radio and Television Union in the hope that *one, or both, of them* would make use of the winning scenarios. But according to Wahba nothing has yet happened and the scripts are still sitting on the shelves, gathering dust.

Mursi Saad El-Din

Leadership and renewal

On his leadership mission, **Adel Safty**, found dynamism and enlightenment, a clear vision for the future, and dedication to nurturing new generations of leaders versed in the principles of humanism and a rational approach to human development



Something different is happening in Egypt today: there is a growing practical, as opposed to rhetorical, commitment to again providing leadership, not only for the region but also for the world. One is almost tempted to wax lyrical about the glory of Egypt's past and a new renaissance of new glories to be made. But before one gets carried away, let's realistically recognise that the familiar is still prevalent and the new has to be sought out and analysed.

Any visitor to Egypt is struck by the familiar: the streets are as noisy as ever; the sense of civic responsibility is not yet widely shared by the man in the street; the traffic obeys laws of its own; bureaucratic habits die hard; Ramadan traffic jams meant that I often arrived faster walking than waiting in a taxi stuck in the traffic; the Nile is subject of the greed of some unethical contractors, builders, and real-estate owners; the prices of some luxury apartments continue to sky-rocket.

But there are also some new but evident changes: the success of the economic reforms which are making Egypt an attractive emerging market for international investors and driving its stock market through the roof; the growing number of joint ventures; the very latest cars; the unbelievable prices of land, and the commitment of President Mubarak to ambitious projects and to making Egypt an attractive place to visit and in which to invest.

There is also unprecedented freedom of the press, not enough according to some, but certainly unprecedented since the 1952 Revolution. This freedom of the press is obvious not only in the opposition papers but also in the diversity of views expressed in the official papers, and more significantly, in established and widely-read magazines.

What is not immediately obvious to the casual observer is the intellectual commitment of Egyptian leaders to the very notion of leadership and its importance in today's world, and at this crucial juncture of human development.

I came to Egypt last month to meet with Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Moussa and other Egyptian leaders. I wanted to introduce to them the latest United Nations institutions, the United Nations University (UNU) branch in the Middle East which I am heading for the purpose of establishing the International Leadership Academy (ILA).

The ILA is the first United Nations institution globally devoted to leadership in its multifaceted dimensions. It has a universal mandate to train beginning and potential leaders, from various fields, from all around the world in leadership skills. But unlike traditional leadership programmes in Europe and America, the ILA's leadership conception goes behind leadership as good management skills. It seeks to include good management skills within a broader context of greater awareness of and commitment to cardinal United Nations principles and values such as peaceful resolution of disputes and rational approach to solving pressing issues of human development and welfare. The intellectual assumption is that good management skills enriched by humanistic values such as these will help produce leaders with a broader perspective and an enlightened vision which goes beyond simply looking for the bottom line in any enterprise or undertaking.

The ILA is also distinctive from any other leadership programme in the world in that it relies on the pedagogically innovative approach of letting its participants interactively learn about leadership directly from successful and experienced leaders. Former secretary-general of the United Nations, Dr Boutros Ghali was supportive and officially launched the International Leadership Academy, with Queen Noor of Jordan, at the United Nations on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the United Nations in October 1995.

I have been to South America, North America, Asia, and Europe and received support and encouragement for the ILA and its international mission. But I have also met with cynicism and lack of interest. I was therefore pleasantly surprised to find that the Middle East, fertile ground for conflicts and bloodshed for decades, is supportive of the need to help the new generation of leaders acquire an enlightened vision of leadership. I met with Shimon Peres, former prime minister of Israel. Palestinian Minister of Education Yasser Amr was most supportive, as was President Yasser Arafat.

In Jordan, I was received by HM King Hussein and HM Queen Noor whom I found to be extremely committed to a humane and enlightened perspective in international relations.

But in all my travels nowhere did I meet as deep an intellectual commitment to the idea as I did in Egypt. First, I met with Dr Osama El-Baz. I was struck by his relaxed style. His commitment to an ongoing dialogue with the new generation is precisely the kind of intellectual bridge the United Nations, through the United Nations University, wants to build to encourage the emergence of enlightened new leaders.

I met with Dr Moufid Shehab, the president of Cairo University, who promised contact and cooperation. I was charmed by Mohamed Hassanein Heikal. I admired his principled positions, and his contagious laughter.

Dr Mohamed Abdellah, chairman of the Parliamentary Foreign Relations Committee, seems an urbane, cultured, and highly charming modern politician. His sense of humor and ability to laugh at problems gave his observations a sharp edge. Dr Abdellah's grasp of the need for such a leadership programme at the international level was apparent. Minister of Education Dr Hussein Kamel Bahaeddin also has a clear vision of what type of education is needed today and what it can do in the face of the wave of technology and fundamental changes in cultural and social values.

My meeting with Foreign Minister Amr Moussa was equally fruitful. In few words, he said a great deal about his grasp of, and commitment to, leadership and to what it can do at the national as well as at the international levels.

What is remarkable about the Egyptian leaders' response to the leadership project is not their ability to grasp the importance of good leadership. They are all highly educated people and Egypt has an unusually large pool of highly educated people. Nor is it the sense that Egypt wants to provide leadership: civilisation in the Pharaonic age, culture and Islamic thought, modernisation under Muhammad Ali, parliamentary democracy in the inter-war period, non-alignment at the height of the Cold War, technology during the 1973 War, political thought and action under Sadat, and economic reforms under Mubarak: all these are instances of egyptian leadership. Nor is Egyptian support for and commitment to the United Nations a new phenomenon.

What is remarkable is the Egyptian leaders' support for the project's premise: the need to think about the new generation of leaders and to help them provide responsible leadership; the need to think about succession and help prepare for it. This is difficult in the best of democracies, and remarkable in a developing country.

The writer is head of the United Nations University's new Middle East branch.

Healing Helwan

A large-scale project, sponsored by Mrs Mubarak, aims to rid Helwan of pollution and poverty. **Dina Ezzat** reports

You can tell as soon as you arrive: the area in front of the Helwan metro station suggests that living conditions in this southern Cairo suburb are poor. Poverty, however, is not the only obvious ailment; pollution is more conspicuous still.

On Sunday 23 February, Mrs Suzanne Mubarak has planned a meeting with the minister of scientific research to give the go-ahead to a sustainable development master plan designed to improve health and economic conditions in Helwan.

Over the past fifty years, Helwan, once a celebrated health spa, has become, first, the symbol of the nation's industrialisation, then one of the most polluted zones in Cairo — one of the seven most polluted cities in the world.

Sources and kinds of pollution proliferate. The air is polluted with emissions from cement factories and steel smelters; the land is polluted with solid waste from nearby hospitals and factories; the water of the Nile where it runs through Helwan is polluted by waste from factories and houses alike.

"The Helwan we are living in now is very different from the Helwan I remember from the very early years of my childhood. In those days, trees flanked the road and the factories were built at a sufficient distance from the residential area," remembers Amer, an agriculture engineer. "The situation started to deteriorate after 1977, and now we are in a real pollution trap."

Most of the trees of Amer's childhood are long gone. Even the trees of the once beautiful Japanese Gardens have turned white, their leaves coated by the emissions of the cement factories.

Informal urbanisation, too, has been mushrooming dangerously close to the factories.

"I first came here in the mid-1960s, with my husband. He was offered a job at one of the military factories here. At the time, there were far fewer people, but as people kept arriving they had to find a place to live," says 55-year-old Fawziya Abdel-Aziz.

New migrants and older residents alike suffer from serious chest infections. Nor are the factories alone responsible for these harsh conditions: studies suggest that it is the explosive mixture of poverty and pollution which is taking its toll on the inhabitants' health.

Over 100 grams of dust per square metre cover the total Helwan area — ten times the internationally tolerated standard. Concentrations of air-borne particles which aggravate nose, throat and chest diseases also far exceed recommended levels. Moreover, studies suggest that, due to the high concentrations of lead in air, water and land, the vast majority of children born and living in Helwan are physically underdeveloped for their age, both at birth and throughout their childhood.

All these problems, it is clear, must be tackled in concert. This is the aim of a plan for sustainable development proposed by the Ministry of Scientific Research. "We are fully aware of the alarming dimensions of the pollution problem in Helwan, and this is specifically why we thought of the project," says Minister of Scientific Research Venice Kamil Gouda.

Having spent over a year and a half studying all the problems of Helwan, Gouda presented a project to Mrs Mubarak and asked for support so that sufficient funds could be raised to start implementation. According to Gouda, "the master plan that we have in mind consists of some 40 projects that will take at least $500 billion and some ten years to implement."

The Helwan Sustainable Development Programme, researchers at the ministry say, has been formulated as a model for a holistic analytical approach. Hopefully, the programme will result in the elaboration of a realistic development strategy for this highly polluted area.

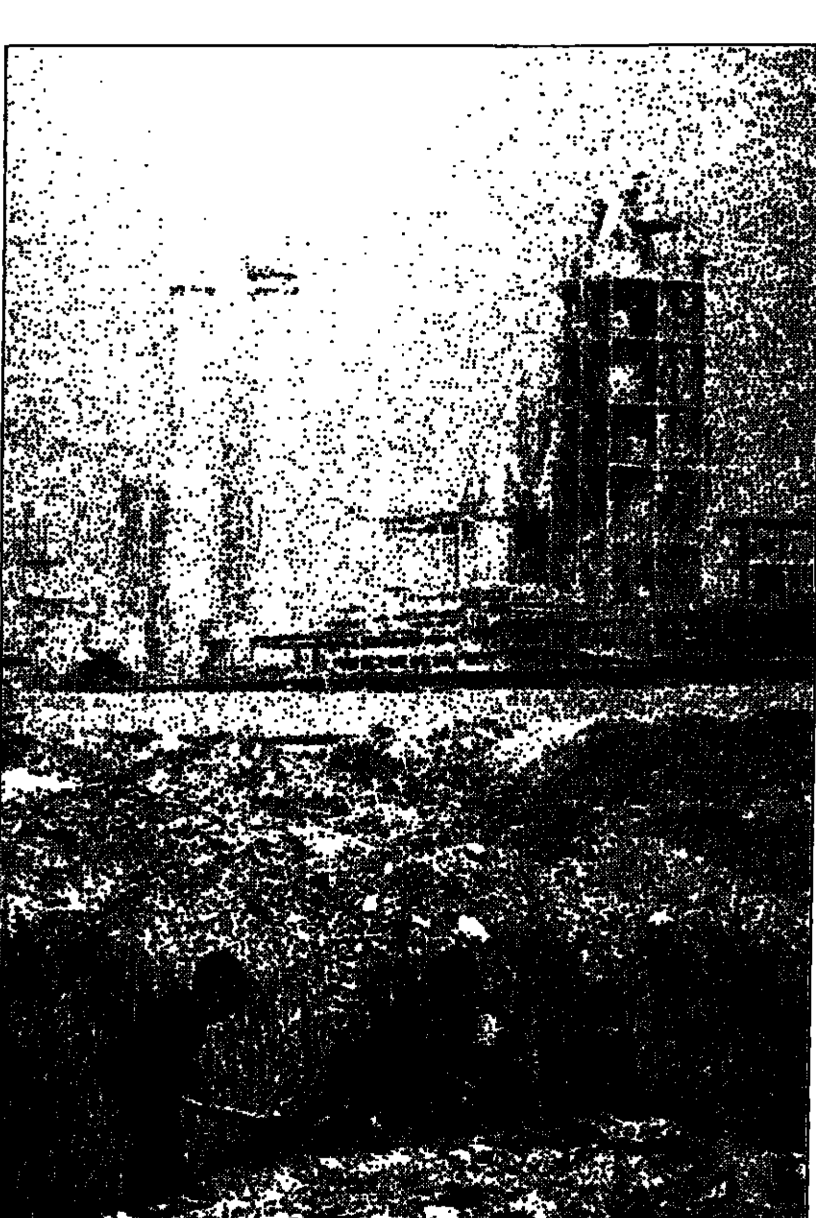
"This mega-project will face two major challenges," says Medhat El-Halwagi, head researcher and project consultant. The first is to restore ecological and developmental equilibrium; the second, to elevate the educational and economic standards of Helwan's residents in an attempt to ensure that the achievements envisaged will be carried through by the inhabitants themselves.

The team of researchers have come up with several concrete suggestions: existing and planned factories should be equipped with the technology necessary to bring emissions down to international standards; more trees should be planted throughout the area; and new medical centres, able to provide affordable health care, must be established. The researchers also indicate that, for the project to become sustainable, school enrolment rates must increase significantly, new job opportunities must be provided, and the "haphazard" (slum) areas must receive their share of infrastructure, utilities and services.

"But of course, the government doesn't have all the necessary funds to do all of this," says Gouda. The minister, however, has approached several foreign donors, who have pledged support. "Each donor can choose a project to implement; in other words several projects should be implemented simultaneously," says Gouda. The leading figures of the Egyptian business community and expatriate Egyptian businessmen have also been approached, and they, too, "promised support". According to Gouda, businessmen hope that, when they buy some of the factories put on the market in the context of the current privatisation scheme, they will modernise them in order to reduce pollution and increase productivity and profits. "This, in fact, is the basic objective of major economic reform and socio-economic development programmes in Egypt, namely to upgrade socio-economic standards," Gouda notes.

According to Gouda, non-governmental organisations will also be invited to pitch in to fill in the gaps left by the government. "Since the government has limited resources, it is going to worry about non-profit projects like improving and expanding the infrastructure and improving the quality of buildings in the slum areas. This is the role of the government and we are committed to it," she said.

Helwan resident Abdel-Aziz has heard about the project. "They talked about it on some TV programmes," she says vaguely. Abdel-Aziz is not fully aware of what the project is all about: "I didn't really understand," she says. But she does care about promises that standards of living will improve.



Many children born in Helwan are underdeveloped for their age (photo: AFP)

Pot Pourri

Furry friends

"Please come in. I hope you are not allergic to cats." Many people are. Others are simply wary. A few have turned their instinctive fear of animals into an exquisite terror that sends shivers down their spines at the mere sound of the word: cat. It seems to conjure up images of a snarling beast out to get them. Many used to be good friends. Nowadays we only speak on the phone. "How many cats do you have now?" is a common question. "Twelve" I say, as briefly as I can. "Do you want a couple?" They never do. They usually suggest ways of exterminating them. The worst expound on what they have done lately to rid their street of strays. I try to pick up any lead that may take their minds off the topic. I love animals; I can't keep losing my friends. Only the very young can make new ones easily. They usually agree that I am mentally deranged, but at least I am not dangerous. They ring off on this reassuring note, promising to call again soon. Not all of them do. I haven't seen many of them in years. I no longer invite them to my house, and consequently they cannot return my invitations.

Now, I am not claiming that picking stray cats up off the streets is as popularity-enhancing, or as elegant, as playing golf, for instance. It comes with its drawbacks, especially if one lives in an apartment. One has to share a limited space with creatures whose habits are different, and although, by and large, they are prepared to mind their own business, they can get in the way of some of one's favourite activities, that of collecting pricey pieces of old china, for instance. I read once that an antique dealer who kept cats in his shop claimed that they never broke anything, with one or two exceptions, and in these cases the broken items invariably turned out to be fakes. In all honesty, I must report that either my strays have been deprived of the talent for sniffing out imitation antiques, or that I have never owned an authentic object in my life. I did once have a cat who was an expert of sorts, though. He was fond of textiles, and was an extremely discerning connoisseur. He favoured pure woollens, cashmeres preferably. He loved the stuff so much that he actually ate every pullover, skirt or coat whose price indicated the purity of its material. He despised blends and synthetics. These we kept for ever. I always warned my visitors of my cat's peculiarity and had full-length nylon covers available to protect expensive winter garb.

A friend came to visit one winter evening. She was wrapped in something that she told me was her mother's beautiful mink. I am not into furs myself. I am not one of the violent acid-thrower objectors of course, but I think that, if we were meant to wear a fur, surely we would have been born with one. This is why, until that fated day, our Pepe had not really had a chance to sample the stuff. Going by the principle of better safe than sorry, I offered to remove my friend's coat to a secure place. Pepe was perched on the arm of the sofa, his head lowered modestly, casting crafty sidelong glances at my friend, his nostrils twitching passionately. I couldn't be sure what he meant. After all, he may nave mistaken her for a larger-than-life member of his family. I explained his idiosyncrasy at length, however. She did not believe me, or, more to the point, thought that I was after her coat, no doubt intending to use her dead animal skin in some sadistic ritual. It crossed my mind that she did not fear for her mink; after all, I had said that Pepe was an expert, only targeting the real thing — but that was a mean thought, of course. I kept it to myself.

My attentions to the turkey completed, we repaired to the dining room. I noticed that she had left her fur behind, but reflected that it would be in bad taste to warn her once more. We had a lovely meal and adjourned once more to the living room for coffee. "Why do you have so many cockroaches?" cried my friend in horror, staring at the sofa on which she had been sitting just a short while ago. Not only had she presumably sat on the dreadful creatures, but she had just consumed a large meal cooked in my kitchen. If cockroaches roamed freely in the living room, what did my kitchen look like, she wanted to know. I took the slight without a word. Unlike her, I had instantly recognised the furry brown bits now strewn on the sofa. Pepe had sunk his delicate little canines into the coat, but had not liked what he had tasted. Instead of swallowing the mouthfuls he had snatched so greedily, he had just spat them out, trying again and again. The bald collar of what was once "mother's beautiful mink coat" was testimony to his frustrated appetite. Seemingly disgruntled, Pepe was curled up on the remains of his aborted repast. He looked coldly at my friend, the gleam in his pale eyes a tacit condemnation of her dissimulation. I am sad to say that I never heard of this particular friend again.

Fayza Hassan

Sufra Dayma

Spinach with béchamel

Ingredients:
1 kg green spinach
1/4 kg minced meat
I onion (finely chopped)
1 tsp crushed garlic
1 litre whole milk
2 tbsp white flour
1 cube beef or chicken stock
Grated yellow cheese
Breadcrumbs
Butter
Salt + pepper + allspice
Method"

Wash the spinach well, chop it finely, and put it in a strainer. Boil one litre of water and pour it over the chopped spinach and leave it to drain its waters, every now and then pressing it with the back of a cooking spoon. In the meantime, gently fry the onion in butter only until yellowish, then add the garlic, stir it in for seconds then add the minced meat, stir it in and leave it to cook. Add the strained spinach, stir it in and leave it to cook until it absorbs any liquid residue and becomes dry. Put this mixture in a baking pan, smeared with butter and sprinkled with breadcrumbs. Add some of the grated cheese on top of the mixture. In another pan, melt some butter and gently stir the flour, then gradually add the milk while stirring with the other hand. Put the stock cube and stir until the béchamel thickens. Pour it over the spinach and sprinkle the rest of the grated cheese. Bake in a moderately preheated oven until the top is golden. Serve hot.

Moushira Abdel-Malek

Restaurant review

The great outdoors

Nigel Ryan on umbrellas and topiary

Flower beds, bird song, a hint of the pastoral. Well-manicured lawns, marble statuary of antique subjects, topiary and in the distance the trickle of water dropping from a fountain. A little further away the sound of traffic though no more, thank goodness, than a gentle hum. And all of this in the centre of Cairo. So choose your wicker chair, adjust the green umbrella that shades the table, and order from the menu of the Promenade Café at the Marriott Hotel.

It is not the food, really, that you have come for, but the garden. And it is a very pleasant place to be in the afternoon, especially when the weather is as glorious as it was on the day, last week, that I visited. It hardly seems fair that February can be like this. But it is, so make the most of it.

The selection of food on offer at the Promenade Café is not extensive. On each table is one of those clear plastic menu holders that I always associate with ice-cream parlours, detailing the varieties of pizza — five or six in total — on offer. There is also a second menu, for which it is necessary, apparently, to make a special request. Once this is done, though, the menu is swiftly delivered to your table. Once again it is far from extensive.

I ordered a "BBQ chicken salad", something I am not in the habit of doing since I have a faint horror of the kind of pre-packaged barbecue sauces that seem to go with the territory. The menu promised breast of chicken, barbecued of course, on garden greens, with croutons and, I seemed to recall, corn and spring onions. Well, there was no corn, no spring onions, and the croutons were as disappointing as only croutons can be. The garden greens were in fact bits of those crisp, long lettuces, the rest of the salad comprising tomatoes, green pepper and cucumber in copious quantity. Everything, though, was perfectly fresh, and if the ingredients could hardly be said to exhibit imagination, the dressing was perfectly nice, perking up what might have been a trifle bland. And there, in the midst of all the greenery sitting on my plate, which was itself sitting on a table beneath a green umbrella set in the oh so green gardens of the hotel, was a white china pot containing the sauce. This I cannot comment on, since I did not dip. The chicken, without it, tasted of chicken, which is precisely how charcoaled chicken should taste. The salad was enormous. The bread, with which it was served, small flat baladi loaves, was also good.

What else? Well, very little. It is, as I said before, not really the food that you come here for. It is an ideal place simply to while away the time. The weather was perfect. And the price? LE 38 for the chicken salad and a bottle of mineral water. An afternoon in the sun, in the heart of the city, and for my money, well worth it.

The Promenade Café, Marriott Hotel, Zamalek.

Al-Ahram Weekly

Crossword

By Samia Abdennour

ACROSS

1. Cobble; macadamise (4)
5. Vital; radical (5)
9. Fastener; escape (4)
14. Boy's name (4)
15. Husband of Bathsheba, sent to death treacherously by David (5)
16. Money-exchange business (4)
17. Boohoo; snivel (4)
18. Extent (5)
19. views (4)
20. Oil used in perfumery (6)
22. Maker of melodies and charmer of rocks and beasts (7)
24. Glean (4)
26. Small dear (3)
27. Ancient Parisian fortress (8)
31. Antiseptic solution (6)
35. Singles out (4)
36. Resentment; vials of wrath (5)
38. Acknowledge (3)
39. Vitiate (3)
40. Man with golden touch (5)
41. Toothed wheel (3)
42. Lady's garment (3)
43. Theory, ideology (5)
44. Deception; stratagem (4)
45. Phonograph needle (6)
47. Set of false teeth (8)
50. The ampersand (3)
51. Indicts (4)
52. Car's back seat part (7)
56. Black-guard; little devil (6)
60. district (4)
61. Dams (5)
64. Jot (4)
65. Be off! (4)
66. Expunge (5)
67. Nerve-cell impulse-carrying process (4)
68. Overfill (4)
69. Clans (5)
70. Designate (4)

DOWN

1. Hypothecate (4)
2. On the sheltered side (3)
3. Change course (4)\
4. Ships overseas (7)
5. Funeral (6)
6. Association of the royal Academy, abb. (3)
7. Sacrilege; profanation (3)
8. A Shakespearean character (4)
9. A stone-fruit, pl. (8)
10. Struck heavily (6)
11. S-shaped line (4)
12. Place (4)
13. Pitch; turn over (4)
21. Polynesian garland of flowers (3)
23. Impecunious (4)
25. Clear-cut; unadorned (5)
27. Fireballs (5)
28. By itself (5)
29. Ramble; get lost (5)
30. Finished (5)
32. Be liable (5)
33. Hangman's halter (5)
34. Perimeters (5)
37. Entrances (5)
40. Ladies, Fr. (8)
43. Melody (4)
44. Native of Caucasus, Circassia or Georgia (7)
46. Woolly (6)
48. Tends to (6)
49. Pekoe (3)
52. Small draught (of brandy) (4)
53. Killer whale (4)
54. Shipshape (4)
55. Urea, jumbled (4)
57. First segment of insect's leg (4)
58. Particle (4)
59. Passageway (4)
62. Thwack (3)
63. Superlative suffix (3)

Last week's solution

هكذا من الأصل

The fallout of economic reforms has combined with the rising influence of religious conservatism to make the workplace increasingly hostile to women's presence. But, as **Faiza Rady** finds out, women are determined to maintain their space in the labour market. For them, work is not a matter of ideology but of their, and their families', survival

An Egyptian feminine mystique



photo: Randa Shaath

Despite all the pressures, women are not "returning to the home"

"I asked my husband for a divorce about 15 years ago, when he decided to send my six-year-old son to work. His idea was that children should help support the family. I suppose he didn't know any better since he himself had been a child apprentice. But getting a divorce was no easy business. In the end, I had to pay him in return for my family's freedom," recalled Fatma, a 40-year-old single parent of two and head of household. Since the divorce Fatma has not received a penny in child support from her ex-husband and raised her children by working as a cleaning woman.

"It has been a heavy burden to carry this kind of responsibility on my own, but now I feel that we have almost made it," she reflected. In effect, Fatma managed remarkably well as a single parent. Although illiterate, like 62 per cent of all Egyptian women, she values education as a means of breaking out of the poverty cycle. Fatma invested everything she earned in her children's education, even selling her gold to provide them with costly school books and private tutoring during the dreaded final year of high school.

Despite the deprivation and hardship Fatma and her family endured, she feels that it was all worth while since her children are now on their way to becoming upwardly mobile. Her son, Hani, is a second-year student in the prestigious Faculty of Engineering at Cairo University, while her daughter Myriam started college last autumn.

"I am very proud of them," explained Fatma, "but I don't believe our story is exceptional. I know many other women who have taken menial and sometimes demeaning jobs to give their children an education," she said.

Although Fatma's story may not be exceptional — she is one among several million Egyptian women who raise their children alone — her success story very likely is.

According to an education report published last year by UNESCO and based on the Egyptian government's statistics, in 1990 only 45 per cent of Egyptian girls were enrolled in primary school and 44 per cent in secondary school. Poverty deprives 55 per cent of school-aged girls of their right to education. A majority of these girls come from broken homes, where the mother is the only provider. According to the New Woman's Study and Research Centre, nearly a quarter of all Egyptian households are women-headed.

In periods of economic retrenchment and job losses, women have been the most affected. Rising rates of unemployment in the '70s and '80s were accounted for mostly by women. Thus, according to a study by political scientist Mervat Hatem, men's unemployment rates remained stable when economic liberalisation took off in 1976 while female unemployment shot up to 29.8 per cent — although it fluctuated in the following years with the mass exodus of male workers to the Gulf countries, explained Hatem.

By 1986 overall unemployment had reached 14.7 per cent. Out of every five unemployed people, four were women. And in 1992, unemployment hit 17 per cent, affecting some 2.8 million people, recorded the Egyptian government's 1995 Human Development Report (HDR). "Job opportunities are becoming fewer and fewer for both men and women, but especially for women. As usually happens in times of rampant unemployment, the answer that seems to offer itself most readily is to send women back to their homes," reported a 1993 study by the government's Central Agency for Public Mobilisation and Statistics (CAPMAS).

The rising unemployment rate and the resulting dire economic conditions forced women to look for alternative means of income. Consequently they swelled the ranks of the informal sector, many of them toiling as domestic workers. Undocumented and unprotected by social legislation and labour unions, they became highly vulnerable to employer exploitation and abuse.

Mabrouka, a bright and articulate 18-year-old, experienced such abuse as a juvenile domestic worker. "I was six years old when my father died. He left us very poor, so my mother took me out of school and sent me to work for a well-to-do family," she recounted. "At the beginning, they felt sorry for me because I was very scared and cried a lot. But after a while, when I got used to the place, they started abusing me. I soon became everybody's target. One day, I lost one pound while going to the market. I was too scared to face them, so I boarded a bus and took the 200km journey home. I was only eight years old and I felt that I had lost my childhood."

"The majority of poor Egyptian women work in the informal sector," sociologist Shahida El-Baz told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. Besides finding employment as domestics, they become street vendors and peddlers, or work in their homes sewing and embroidering ready-made clothes for exclusive and high-priced retailers.

"Although paid sub-minimal wages by retailers, they give a substantial tranche of their meagre incomes to middlemen who manage and distribute their production," noted El-Baz, adding that the informal sector disproportionately reflects the relative weakness or strength of the formal economy. Weakness and upheavals in the formal sector are reflected many-fold in the informal sector, whose workers are the most vulnerable section of the labour market.

One major effect of economic policy on women's employment has been the result of the government-imposed freeze on job recruitment in the public sector. The largest employer of women since the late 1950s, the job freeze in the public sector caused the rate of unemployment among young women entering the work force for the first time to shoot up to 76.4 per cent, states the HDR.

Moreover, the severe budget cutbacks imposed on the public sector's industrial companies since the early '80s made managers increasingly reluctant to hire women. "Managers consider them as poor employment risks because of their need for maternity leave and child care. The cost of both made their labour expensive," commented Hatem.

The results of such discriminatory employment patterns are reflected in the gender composition of industry. While 25 per cent of the male work-force is employed in production, only 13 per cent of the female work force are industrial workers. Instead, the bulk of women workers are concentrated in lower-paying service jobs where they make up 56 per cent of the work-force.

Feminist and human rights groups claim that employment ads now blatantly violate the constitutionally guaranteed equal employment provision by exclusively seeking men for certain job categories.

Topping the list are high and mid-level executive managerial positions and production or service jobs requiring technical skills. Government studies confirm that the growing trend is to marginalise women in the work force. "By law there is no discrimination in wages on the basis of sex, i.e. men and women receive the same wages for doing the same job. In reality, however, women are relegated to the least-skilled, lowest-paying jobs and their chances for advancement are much less than men's chances," wrote CAPMAS.

Economist Adel Lutfy reported that a survey of the national newspapers' employment ads showed that only 17 per cent addressed women. Among those, 69 per cent were ads for secretaries, 16 per cent for jobs in industrial production and 13 per cent for domestic help. The CAPMAS study confirmed Lutfy's findings. "It is now quite common for Cairo daily newspapers to publish advertisements for job opportunities that clearly specify that women need not apply," reported CAPMAS.

Facing a shrinking labour market and gradually pushed into inferior jobs and the informal sector, women are further marginalised by the rising conservatism and religious fundamentalism that has increasingly come to influence public discourse during the last two decades. Writers, religious preachers and politicians have been calling openly on women to "return to the home," and blaming women's employment for a variety of social ills, including drug abuse among youth, the breakdown of families, licentiousness and immorality, even rape crimes.

It even reached the People's Assembly, when in 1978, MP Saad El-Sharid suggested women should be paid half their salaries to retire from their jobs — allegedly because they cannot reconcile their work with their household duties.

In more recent years, the same proposal has resurfaced, albeit at a cheaper exchange rate: legislators now propose to send working women packing in return for a quarter of their salaries.

Women's employment has, in particular, become the theme of the religious right. "Woman's first, holy, and most important mission is to be a wife and mother. She cannot ignore this priority. If she then finds she has free time, she may participate in public activities. Islam does not forbid her," explained Zeinab El-Ghazali, the elderly Islamist activist and founder of the Muslim Women's Association.

While opponents of women's work conveniently resurface in periods of high unemployment, Islamists are highly ingenious at adapting their discourse to the current economic crisis. Youssef El-Badri, director of the US-based Omar Ibn El-Khattab Islamic Centre and former member of the People's Assembly, told the *Weekly* that although Islam has granted women the right to work, they could not compete with men for jobs. Hence, it is crucial that male applicants should always be given precedence over women in the labour market. "This is because men have to support their families, while women have no such obligation," said El-Badri.

The bleak job prospects, reinforced by the prevalent religious and secular discourses, have taken their toll among young women. Especially affected are lower-middle class and middle-class women students. Sociologist Zeinab Radwan's study of veiled college women showed that many of them believed their education primarily prepared them for their future roles as wives and mothers. Only one third of the sample, 33.2 per cent, thought that a woman's right to work was unquestionable. Another third, 33.7 per cent, said that women should only work in case of need, and 20.9 per cent said that they should not work at all. According to Radwan such social conservatism demonstrates that the students' self-confidence has been effectively undermined by the increasingly prevalent religious conservatism and high female unemployment rates.

While there is no doubt that women have been dramatically affected by economic, social and ideological developments which are growingly hostile to their work, they are tenaciously holding onto their foothold in the workplace.

Social scientists explain women's strong commitment to their work and their desperate — and often ingenious — struggle to find jobs in the informal sector in terms of the deteriorating material conditions. The poor were particularly hard hit by the inflation of basic food items which spiraled over the 1987-91 period. The prices of sugar increased by 433 per cent, rice went up by 830 per cent and *fuul* — the poor people's staple diet — soared by 746 per cent, announced the 1991 annual report of the Egyptian Chamber of Commerce. And according to the 1994 Tagammu' Party's report to the Egyptian government, the average rural and urban families now respectively spend between 60 and 75 per cent of their total income on food, while the corresponding expenditure of the poor reaches 90 per cent. And the cost of medical services has increased by 600 per cent over the 1987-91 period.

The harsh material conditions have imposed a new reality on women. "Poor women, who constitute the great majority of the female working population, don't have the luxury to debate whether they have the right to work. They work in order to survive," said psychiatrist Aida Seif El-Dawla from the New Woman's Study and Research Centre This may explain Egyptian working women's extraordinary strength and resilience in the face of adversity.

Carving out women's space

"Although I am a student and carry a heavy academic load, I just had to get involved in community work. I am one of the few college-educated women in my village and I feel it is my duty to pass on skills to my less privileged sisters, who never had a chance to go to school," said Noha, a third-year student in the Faculty of Agriculture at El-Minya University and a literary instructor for women with Al-Gam'iya Al-Shari'a Al-Islamia, an Islamic non-governmental organisation (NGO), based in Itsa.

At first glance, Itsa looks like any other village in the Upper Egyptian governorate of Minya. Modest, but brightly painted yellow and turquoise adobe houses are built along unpaved mud paths bordering on a narrow canal that leads to the surrounding lush green fields.

"To the outsider our fields look beautiful and fertile, which they are. But we are poorer than other villages because we own very little land," said Ramadan Abul-Ela, the association's director in Itsa.

"Our village of 16,000 people collectively only owns 900 feddans. Given the low distribution of feddan per capita in addition to the unequal distribution of land holdings, most people end up working as agricultural labourers making sub-standard wages," Abul-Ela said. Since the average annual income in Itsa is about LE500, most residents are considered well below the poverty line.

Explaining the scarcity of available land in historical terms, Abul-Ela said that during the 1960s, the local village council never complied with the terms of Nasser's agrarian reforms. As a result, the small peasants' acreage was not increased to the prescribed five feddan plot and the total land-holding remained constant, while neighbouring villages expanded considerably.

Establishing the association came out of the struggle against poverty. "We started to work in 1978, with the aim of combating poverty and its associated ailments like illiteracy, ignorance, poor hygiene and disease," recalled Abul- Ela. "But we faced major problems: We had no funding and we also realised that we lacked experience in community work."

To get out of this impasse the association started networking in the early '90s and gained the support of the Coptic Evangelical Organisation for Social Services (CEOSS) — an established NGO, based in Minya since 1950, with considerable experience in community work and fund raising.

Associating with CEOSS, which has long been involved in setting up development projects for women, was instrumental in getting the association to follow suit.

"Before we started the women's branch, we had nothing in Itsa," said Noha. "Some years ago, when I was still in high school, I spent a lot of time thinking about how I could help my friends who were illiterate or even older women who would ask me to fill out forms they couldn't read. Even then, it was clear to me that they needed something beyond the short-term help I was giving them."

When the association started the women's branch, its first task was to gather information about the women in the community so as to assess their most important needs as well as target a potential pool of activists.

"It was an exhilarating period," recalled Maha, a college graduate. "We would go out in groups early in the morning visiting people and never return home before ten at night. We had a very hard time convincing our parents to let us go. In our village, young women simply don't go out unless chaperoned by a male relative. But we were all so determined to work that, in the end, we managed to have our way."

Besides gathering the relevant statistical data, the field workers received a tremendous response from the women. "It was amazing, many of them simply told us to start classes straight away," remembered Maha. "And even before we finished the survey, some women would drop by the centre asking us to speed up procedures and start with the classes already. It was as if they had just been waiting for us to get them started," she reflected. "The women had so much pent-up energy that needed to be released".

The teaching experiment was highly successful. So far, the association has concluded two sessions of sewing and literacy classes. Besides teaching, the NGO has launched small-scale income generating projects. Last year, they gave out 20 grants to finance various projects for individual women. However, given the conservative social climate in Itsa, all but two of these grants had to be awarded "undercover" to the women's husbands. The men would have lost face in the community had their wives directly received the money — so we had to accommodate them," explained Abul-Ela. "But beyond any round about strategic considerations, our goal is to empower women through education and work."

A tale of ordinary heroism

Tall, dark and exuberantly graceful, *Umm* Mohamed has the kind of presence that is palpable and commands awareness wherever she goes. The first time I saw her was about 30 years ago. Elegantly draped in a black *galabiya*, a colourful *mandil* covering her braided chestnut hair and with a proud, almost defiant, posture, she looked strikingly beautiful.

Yet her beauty seemed incidental, almost irrelevant to her persona. She herself shrugged it off, easily dismissing it as she went about her hard day's labour as a domestic worker. "I don't have time for that," she snapped when I asked her one day about make-up, suggested she enhance her almond-shaped eyes with *kohl* or her lips with gloss. "Do you take me for a lady of leisure? Besides, who exactly do you want me to impress in the kitchen?" she asked derisively.

The mother of eight, *Umm* Mohamed and her family struggled to survive on her and her husband's combined incomes. A low-level government worker, Hussein's meagre salary was supplemented by his wife's modest wages. While scrubbing other people's floors and preparing elaborate gourmet meals, which her children never tasted, *Umm* Mohamed kept her spirit intact over the years while maintaining an invincible optimism. It may be this extraordinary inner resilience, this stubborn quality of defiance and resistance which gives *Umm* Mohamed a unique quality.

Year in and year out, *Umm* Mohamed would both organise and manage a *gami'ya* — a traditional working class women's rotating saving fund — enabling her to finance major projects. When her youngest daughter Nadia got married, *Umm* Mohamed painstakingly furnished her flat. Embarking on endless comparative shopping expeditions and engaging her extensive network of women friends and relatives in the project, she carefully evaluated the cost and quality of each item of furniture, each yard of linen she would decide to buy after many deliberations.

For more than two years, *Umm* Mohamed took on extra jobs, saved on her family's food budget and scraped up every additional penny she could manage to provide for her daughter's household. When Nadia finally married, *Umm* Mohamed looked radiantly proud — but evidence of the prolonged strain showed in the fine lines that started to mark her shapely brow and the corners of her soft brown eyes.

A few days after the wedding, she invited me to visit the bride. To reach Nadia's house, we took a long walk along narrow, unpaved, mud-streaked alleys until we reached a roughly-finished two-storey brick house. As we climbed up a winding staircase, we bumped into a couple of stray goats and a few wandering chickens. On the second floor, *Umm* Mohamed knocked on a weather-beaten door, which Nadia opened almost instantly. When I entered the apartment, I was stunned. Bright, almost luxuriously furnished and sparkling clean, the flat seemed incongruous in the dilapidated, poverty-stricken environment.



Nadia herself looked somewhat outlandish and exotically alluring when compared with the demure and modestly-clad young women in the neighbourhood. Tall and elegant like her mother, Nadia was wearing tight-fitting jeans and a loose burgundy T-shirt. With her silky black hair freely flowing about her shoulders and her lithe and supple movements, she was striking.

Umm Mohamed did not hide her pride: "Doesn't she look like a princess, this daughter of mine? Doesn't she deserve everything I have done for her and more?" she exclaimed.

Nadia led us into the living room where we sat on a comfortable beige sofa, while she reclined on a matching love seat. Pointing to the windows, she made me admire the fluffy, flowing curtains and drapes, which filtered the direct sunlight — giving the room an oblique kind of glow. Nadia was also visibly proud of a carved coffee table facing the sofa, custom-made by her husband — a carpenter. But the young woman soon tired of playing the new bride, instead she started railing against her in-laws.

"They are so ignorant, it's incredible," she said. "My mother-in-law wants me to cook and clean for her, but I told Karim: 'No way, I am nobody's servant.' I decided I won't mingle with them any more, and I'll eat here by myself if Karim won't join me." *Her mother tried to reason with her, but to no avail.*

When I saw *Umm* Mohamed a few months later, she was in tears. Her princess, her beautiful daughter had been so severely battered by her husband and his family that she landed in hospital with broken ribs and multiple bone fractures. Evidently provoked by her disdain and resentful of her cushy accommodations, the family had vented their frustration by abusing the young woman.

While Nadia was recovering in her parents' home, *Umm* Mohamed adamantly pushed for a divorce. But her husband Hussein thought otherwise. *His son-in-law was a close relative and* a divorce would cause a permanent rift within an otherwise closely-knit clan. Besides, a delegation of his in-laws had already come to make amends and asked that Nadia return to her husband. Taking a conciliatory attitude to maintain the clan's unity, and also to spare his daughter the stigma of a divorce, Hussein decided to accept Karim's apologies. Replying with a ritual formula used between men on such occasions, he told his son-in-law before the assembled family: "If you are to be blamed, so is my daughter. She must truly have provoked you." The matter was settled with a handshake, or so it seemed.

For *Umm* Mohamed, however, nothing was settled. Disregarding the men's formal reconciliation, she categorically refused to send her daughter back to "these godless savages" — threatening to leave her husband should he do so. At first, Hussein decided to ignore her. Although *Umm* Mohamed publicly continued to insist Nadia should be divorced, Hussein knew that he and his wife really shared the same deeply-seated values. Like him, *Umm* Mohamed wanted to avoid social stigma at all costs, so he believed she would come around in time. But days turned into weeks and *Umm* Mohamed still refused to release Nadia.

Hussein was in a real bind. At the family meeting, he had committed himself to reconciliation and was now obligated to return his daughter to Karim. Afraid of losing face, yet unwilling and unable to cope without his wife, Hussein told her to set her own terms. *Umm* Mohamed then asked that an extended clan meeting be held, which would include her own family elders, who being matrilineal, had been excluded from the previous meeting. She also demanded to participate in the negotiations.

When the meeting took place, it was really *Umm Mohamed who set the agenda. She agreed to let* Nadia go back to her husband — on the condition that she never be harmed again and remain independent of her in-laws. The matrilineal elders then supported her by requesting that Karim and his family abide by these conditions and take a solemn oath to that effect. After the family complied, Nadia finally returned to her husband's house. And since that time, the young woman has been safe, recalls *Umm* Mohamed.

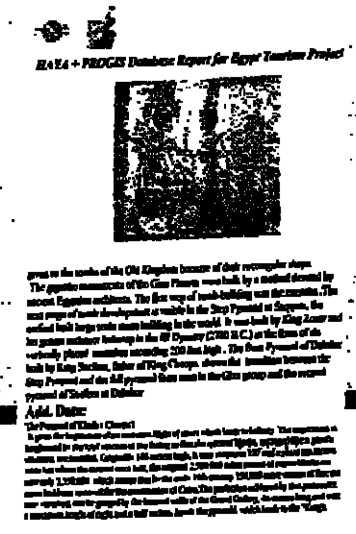
She had accomplished much. Overruling the traditional patriarchal system, she had opened up a space and made her voice heard. She managed to alter the established social conventions to protect her daughter — a younger self.

Yet, at the end of the day, she could not protect herself. *Umm* Mohamed had spent the last 30 years of her life working for one family. Like tens of *thousands of other mostly illiterate and unskilled* domestic workers, she worked without a contract, had no labour union, no health or social security benefits, was totally dependent on the goodwill of her employer.

At the age of 62, by then a widow with high blood pressure and a heart disease, she was casually fired from her job for a minor infraction, her scarf and *galabiya* symbolically dumped on a garbage can. When I saw her several days after the event, she was crestfallen, her face drawn, the pain visible. I couldn't find words to comfort her, so I took her hand. But when she looked at me, I saw the same defiance I had recognised in her dark eyes so many years ago. "Don't worry about me", she simply said, "I will survive."

Egypt on the net

Acquiring tourism and archaeological information through books and maps has become old-fashioned. Electronic maps, the Internet and CDs are the wave of the future. **Rehab Saad** investigates the new technology



A new day has dawned on Egypt's flourishing tourism industry. The nation's heritage and tourism information used to be housed in books and museums. These mediums, however, are quickly losing ground as computers, CD-ROMs and the Internet begin to provide access to almost all available information on the ancient country.

At the moment, there are three local projects using these technologies: The Regional Information Technology and Software Engineering Centre (RITSEC) is putting together an electronic map of all ancient archaeological sites; the Ministry of Tourism is publishing a 2,000-page tourism magazine about Egypt on the Internet; and through the efforts of the private sector, information on Egypt, in full colour and motion, will soon be available on CD.

Heritage-ware

RITSEC, in cooperation with the Cabinet Information and Decision Support Centre and the Ministry of Culture, is creating an electronic archaeological map of Egypt. Using satellite, radar and the Geographical Information System (GIS), the groups hope this map will facilitate registration of the country's heritage.

"This archaeological map has three objectives: to identify and help preserve Egyptian heritage; to prevent haphazard excavations; and, above all, to provide a useful base from which to make urgent decisions about the need to open, close or restore monuments," said Farouq Hosni, minister of culture.

"Apart from descriptions, location, environmental conditions and age, the map also provides images of the site itself," said Dr Ahmed Nazif, chairman of the advisory board of RITSEC.

He added that the five-year project will start with the area around the Toshki canal, west of Lake Nasser in southern Egypt, and extend from there to include all of Egypt's sites.

"The Giza Plateau, the Valley of The Kings and Queens in Luxor and Islamic and Coptic monuments in Cairo are all priorities," Nazif said, stressing that about 600 monuments in Islamic Cairo have already been registered and can be put on the archaeological map.

Using the GIS to electronically map areas was introduced three years ago when the El-Salam Canal project in the Nile Delta and North Sinai commenced. "We did a complete survey of the path of the canal and pinpointed all the archaeological sites so as to avoid them during the digging," he said. RITSEC also retains a database on Ancient Egypt, stored on CD.

"Our main mission is to use the technology to preserve our 5,000-year history, and then disseminate it worldwide. We are building a database of our culture: archaeological sites, museums, manuscripts etc," Nazif said. "We record textual information and create images with multi-media technology. This information is available to anyone using the Internet," he added.

Instead of going to the Egyptian Museum in Tahrir Square, any computer user can visit it and have a look at its masterpieces using the CD prepared by RITSEC called "The Treasures of the Egyptian Museum". This CD includes a photograph, accompanied by information about each item, said Nahed Refat, executive manager of the project. This will also help museum officials keep track of the contents of the museum. Although it is very difficult to review 140,000 documented items, CDs will make the process easier.

Internet tourist magazine

INSTEAD of buying a guide book, tourists can now browse through information about Egypt on the Internet. Recently, the Ministry of Tourism signed a contract with an American company to prepare a special tourist magazine about Egypt for the Internet. The 2,000-page magazine appeared in mid-December 1996. It lists the most important sites, accompanied by pertinent information and attractive photographs.

The magazine is divided into six parts. The first includes up-to-date information on Egypt's airports, ports and roads, obtaining a visa and Egyptian traditions. It also provides tips for travellers regarding currencies and the business days and hours of government and private sector offices as well as markets. Important information on mosques and churches, transportation companies and car rentals is also available. Egyptian cities and the distances between them are available, and an English-Arabic dictionary translates words that may be of use to tourists (about 300 words).

The second section lists organisations and travel agencies working in Cairo, information about hotels (their category, prices, number of rooms, addresses and phone numbers), national and international airlines, as well as the embassies and consulates in Egypt.

The third part covers areas of interest such as Alexandria, Cairo, Luxor, Aswan, the Red Sea, Sinai and the oases, including a detailed map of each.

The fourth section features monuments, museums and temples in Egypt as well as a detailed outline of Egyptian history and lists of kings and deities.

The fifth part includes reports and periodicals published by the Egyptian Tourist Authority (ETA) and the Ministry of Tourism. "This section will be constantly updated," said Adel Abdel-Aziz, head of the ETA.

The sixth section of the magazine lists additional web sights providing information on Egypt, including those issued by organisations such as Cairo University, the American University in Cairo, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, CNN and Nile TV as well as some Egyptian newspapers.

Internet address: http://interoz.com.Egypt

Egypt tourist information system

COMPILING tourism information on CD is the latest idea being promoted in Egypt by one of the private sector companies.

"We are presenting the very first modern tourist directory on CD. We reach the consumer in his home or office. The directory includes full motion pictures, as well as buttons to inquire about restaurants, nightclubs, types of food, pricing, opening hours... etc," said Dina Mahmoud, marketing executive of Hya International Trading Group.

The CD serves as a reference guide to information concerning location, monuments and museums, along with airlines, travel agencies, embassies, hotels, restaurants, bazaars and malls. "Part of the CD presents maps which cover all locations and services mentioned so that the tourist will know exactly where he is and the location of his destination. Using the map guide, the tourist can find the service area closest to his location," said Husseini El-Azhary, chairman of the company. He explained that they began with Egypt and intend to cover the rest of Africa and the Middle East. Information about Egypt has never before been so widely available. New technology certainly serves Egyptian promotional interests.

Study in light and shade



WITHOUT guide or guidebook, this lone tourist was captured by photographer Jihan Ammar as he contemplated a wall relief. It is an unusual sight these days, when thousands of tourists are flown to Luxor by air, herded into air-conditioned buses and ushered around the monuments.

This photograph was taken in the Temple of Karnak's grey sandstone shrine built by Seti I, north of the Great Court. There are three chambers, dedicated to the chief god Amun, his wife Mut and son Khonsu. The well-preserved centre section is where this attentive visitor is standing, digesting a relief of Amun seated in human form, wearing the characteristic headgear of two upright plumes, with his wife and son seated behind him.

Sinai summers — year round

Promoting the Sinai and its resorts both inside Egypt and worldwide was the main topic of an international conference held in South Sinai recently. **Sherine Nasr** reports

Major private sector investors in the Sinai, along with the minister of tourism, Mamdouh El-Beltagui, and the South Sinai governor, Mamdouh El-Zoheri, gathered in Sharm El-Sheikh last week to discuss the promotion and marketing of the peninsula in local and international tourism markets. "This is the first time the growing Sinai market will be promoted by the area's big investors," said Antoun Reyad, a member of the executive committee for the promotion of the Sinai. "It is a vital step and investors have shown their readiness to contribute funds, ideas and manpower," chimed in El-Zoheri. "The government will give every possible support to serious investors, with a view to speeding up tourism development in the area."

The campaign is entitled "Sinai '97 — Come and See for Yourself," and preliminary projects include a huge celebration on Sinai Day, the 25th of April; the opening of the Sinai Tourist Information and Cultural Centre; special weeks for specific foreign countries in South Sinai (the American week will be in July); and promoting Sinai at international trade shows, the biggest of which will be the ITB in Berlin in March.

"Celebrations this year will be different in Sharm El-Sheikh: Decorative flower floats will tour the city, kiosks for selling gifts and take-away snacks will be constructed and traditional dances and exhibitions of water sports will be performed," said Reyad. "Similar carnivals will be organised in other Sinai cities, including Ras-Sudr, Nuweiba and Dahab."

El-Zoheri explained that facilities extended by the government have already attracted foreign as well as local funding. "The flourishing market and the numerous tourism projects under way provide good proof."

Some LE5 million was allocated for the campaign this year. To help provide tourists with easy access to information, a culture and information centre with brochures, maps, books and excursion schedules will be built. "The centre will operate 24 hours a day and information will be provided in several languages. It will also have a reservation system to help tourists find accommodations and facilities," said Nikky Priestley, public relations manager at a five-star hotel in Sharm El-Sheikh. Non-governmental organisations are also becoming more active and establishing their own information offices in the area.

The participation of investors in international tourism conferences and trade fairs is also regarded as an effective move. "A private stand promoting recreational potential and investment opportunities in the Sinai is an example," said Reyad.

"The second major objective of investors is to preserve the environment — the area's most valuable asset — and ensure the architectural harmony of new constructions," he explained.

Hussein Salem, vice-president of the South Sinai Investors' Community, stressed that the Egyptian investors' role is not limited to building more hotels and resort villages, but extends to environmental conservation, particularly when developing public utilities in new tourist areas.

"We have established a desalination plant to supply the tourist areas with drinking water, which has helped to solve the fresh-water shortage problem in Naama Bay," said Salem. The private sector has also established a huge waste treatment plant, using the most advanced technologies.

The Sinai promotional campaign provides an excellent opportunity to sell rooms in facilities now under construction. "We wanted to be prepared for the expected increase in tourists to the Sinai," said Salem. "'Sinai '97, Come and See for Yourself' is a response to Israel's previous motto: 'Come and See Sinai Before the Egyptians Spoil It,'" Salem snapped, sarcastically.

Next year's campaign will be entitled, appropriately: "Sinai, the Jewel."

Notes of a tour guide

More business

NOT only tourists are touring these days. Travel agents and owners of travel agencies from the four corners of the world are also visiting Egypt to look into new destinations, specifically Nubia and the Red Sea coast south of Hurghada. FAM (familiarisation) trips, as they are called, receive the most efficient escorts and tour guides. Reactions have been excellent.

Travel light

AIR travellers to Abu Simbel should be aware that there is no place to store luggage at the airport. This is especially inconvenient for those flying directly back to Cairo, who are required to cart sometimes heavy bags around the temple. Hopefully the problem will be solved when the new terminal, now under construction, is completed. Meanwhile, remember: travel light.

China time

THOUSANDS of Far Easterners are flocking to Egypt to celebrate the Chinese New Year, and travel agencies are expecting even more. Chinese restaurants in Cairo are getting ready because their nationals are conservative about their food — even at the foot of the Pyramids!

Small change

THERE are now portable toilets at most temple sites, but tourists are sometimes surprised by an assistant who expects to be tipped in advance. Most distressing! Remember, carry small change.

Out of reach

ESNA and Edfu, sites of two famous Ancient Egyptian temples, are off the beaten track, unless you are travelling on a Nile cruise. However, they are well worth visiting, even apart from the monuments. They retain the charming flavour of village life that has not quite adjusted to the influx of tourists. Walking through the bazaars, one might be hassled by persistent vendors and carriage drivers, the streets are unpaved and the villagers tend to stare, but remember, these are not show-case communities.

Nile aerobics

TRAVELLERS disembarking from cruise vessels in Luxor have to tread carefully over the docks under construction. Some have commented that a pre-cruise course in aerobics would not be out of place. Meanwhile, take care... the work will soon be finished and things will be back to normal.

Ehab Farag

هكذا من الأصل

Superb cup win

To get their second African Super Cup title Zamalek had to triumph over their arch-enemy Arab Contractors, which they did 4-2 in a penalty shoot-out. **Eric Asomugha** reports

It hardly seems possible that it's been four years since Egyptian arch-rivals Zamalek and Ahli clashed in the South African city of Johannesburg in the 5th African Football Super Cup. It was a memorable encounter for the longtime foes in which Zamalek defeated Ahli 1-0 as result of a magnificent goal by Ayman Mansour.

Last Friday's game at the Cairo Stadium for the African Super Cup title, before 60,000 spectators, was another unforgettable meeting between two Egyptian giants. Champions' Cup winners Zamalek took on Winner's Cup holders Arab Contractors in 90 minutes of play which went over into extra time. Both, had swept one each of the year's three continental cups and thereby set the stage for the battle to settle which team was the continent's best.

Neither team managed to produce the golden goal and the match, which Zamalek eventually won 4-2, became the first African Super Cup to be decided on penalty.

While it was doubtless a moment of great relief and joy for Zamalek, the Arab Contractors couldn't seem to grasp that the defeat was real. In the penalty shoot-out Zamalek's Ayman Mansour, Algerian Kaci Said, Mohamed Sabri and Ahmed Kass converted theirs for goals. On the Contractors' side-shooter Ali Ashour's shot was saved by Zamalek goalkeeper Nader Sayed. Ashour's mis-step was somewhat erased when Hysam Hussein and Mohamed Aref managed to score. But, unfortunately for the Contractors, Saad Abdel-Beid's kick was successfully parried by the goalkeeper and the victory went to Zamalek. The penalty outcome was what one Contractors' fan described as "a painful and awful way to decide a championship".

The attendance of their former goalkeeper the Cameroonian Joseph Antoine Bell no doubt raised the Contractors' spirits but it had no influence on the final outcome. Bell, together with the 1976 African "Footballer of the Year" Karim Abdul Razak and Sierra Leone's Ismail Dyfan, led the Contractors to victory in the African Cup Winner's Cup in 1982 and 1983. "Had Bell been in goal today it would have been a different result," commented Mohamed Hassan, a fan.

It was, as regards play, virtually the Arab Contractors' game from the word go. They did the playing but Zamalek did the winning. The Contractors dominated both halves of the match with fast and well coordinated foot work from both sides. Still, ill-luck and poor finishing cost them the trophy.

For fans it was a tense, action-packed match, as expected, due to the high stakes. The two teams both had disappointing outings in their last league matches and were looking to wash away any lingering fan doubts. Zamalek suffered a surprise away 1-0 loss to Ittihad, their first in the season while Arab Contractors lost to Masri 1-0 in Port Said.

The Contractors, throughout the match, kept up the pressure with the stellar performance of Zizo outstanding. Another magnicifent moment almost unfolded when Ali Ashour and Tamer Nihas, assisted by Mohamed Aref, forced their way into the opponent's zone but failed to score.

Under strain, Zamalek still managed to come close to scoring on two occasions in the first half. In the 12th minute, Mansour kicked the ball straight into the waiting hands of the goalkeeper, while Mohamed Sabri's 32nd minute rocket-propelled shot flew just inches above the cross bar.

Three major changes came about in the second half when Zamalek goalkeeper Hussein Sayed was replaced by penalty expert Nader Sayed in the 18th minute. The switches continued as Ahmed Kass came in for Khalid Gandour and the Algerian Said took Ismail Yusuf's place. On the other end, the Contractors brought in Mohamed Abdel-Sattar with only five minutes left on the clock.

A dangerous counter-attack by Zamalek came in the 44th minute when Essam Marei broke loose on the right side and crossed the ball. One, two, three and Zamalek were inside the Contractors box. Mohamed Sabri made contact in what seemed to be the deciding goal, but a cluster defense, with Ahmed Kass not well positioned to finish up, saved the day.

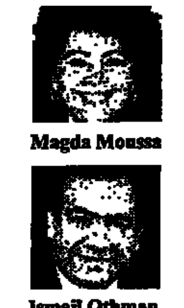
The extra time was similar to the expired 90 minutes — Arab Contractors dictated most of the tempo and missed a few more chances. Tamir headed off target in the 5th minute while Zizo's curling shot from outside the side box hit the goal post. In the dying minute, Zamalek's Tarek Mustafa, in a solo effort, almost clinched the victory that was later decided on penalty.



Arab Contractors' Abdel-Satar Sabri running with the ball and trapped by Zamalek's two players *photo:Mohamed Wassim*

The special Olympians

The Egyptian mentally handicapped team returned triumphant with 11 medals from the 1997 Special Olympics in Canada. **Abeer Anwar** reports



Magda Moussa

Ismail Othman



Egypt's mentally handicapped team with their coaches on their victorious arrival from Special Olympics '97

A delegation of mentallly handicapped athletes travelled to Toronto, Canada for the games, held 2-9 February, after receiving an invitation from the Special Olympics International. The athletes, among the 2,000 participants from 75 countries, divided into twelve groups, returned triumphant from the 1997 Special Olympics with a total of 11 medals.

Egypt's 12-member hockey team skated to second place for the silver medal in the floor hockey and personal skills competitions against well-known teams from Germany, Australia, and Monaco. But the Caribbean island state of Saint Lucia surprised all by claiming the first place trophy leaving third to Germany behind Egypt. All the athletes were divided into groups according to their age and mental disability to ensure fairness to all.

The Egyptian team was formed three months ago by technical manager, Ali Salama from among the special societies and communities that are members of the Special Olympics Egypt (SOE). The team trained three times a week at the Misr Language Schools (MLS) and at the headquarters of the SOE. "It was a long way to the medal as it was very difficult to encourage the athletes to mingle and form one harmonious team," commented Salama. One week prior to the games the team entered a closed camp at the Arab Contractors Club for further training.

After the team won second place, Hani Abdel-Khalek, the team's administrator said, "It's a great achievement since this was the first time the team competed in an international championship."

Egypt initially formed the SOE in 1982 to facilitate the athletes' access to competitions abroad. But the attempt only came to fruition when Ismail Othman took over as head of the SOE and Magda Moussa was named regional manager two years ago. With the help of the society, mentally handicapped athletes started playing table-tennis, basketball, volleyball, swimming, hockey and athletics. A juniors football team, recognised as the first ever for the mentally handicapped, was formed at the instigation of Moussa and it participated in the Arab Championship held in Jordan. The new team managed to nab third place in the tournament which included teams from Jordan, Palestine, Syria and Lebanon.

Egypt sent a volleyball team to the 1996 Special Olympics held in the American state of Connecticut. The delegation may have been small but the results were big — the team managed to bring home the gold medal. "This year we participated with a hockey team because we are trying to give a chance to the different mentally handicapped teams in the different sports as this affects and helps the psychology of the athletes themselves," explained Moussa.

The 1997 team included Mahmoud Ramadan, Ahmed Hafez, Makram Ali, Abdel Mohsen Abdel-Bari, Haythum Ragab, Ahmed Mohamed, Mohamed Said, Hani Ali, Hanafy Mahmoud, Ahmed Ibrahim, Amr Mahmoud, Sherif Farouk, Mohamed Khairy and Mustafa Ibrahim.

The SOE is near to commencing construction on a mega city for mentally handicapped athletes in all sports. It is to be the first of its kind in the Arab world and will incorporate the MLS as its headquarters. Officials from the World Special Olympics have paid a number of visits to the SOE for discussions with both Othman and Moussa.

The doors of opportunity are ever widening for the mentally handicapped to prove themselves. And the large number of medals that the physically and mentally handicapped have returned home with from competitions abroad testifies to their abilities.

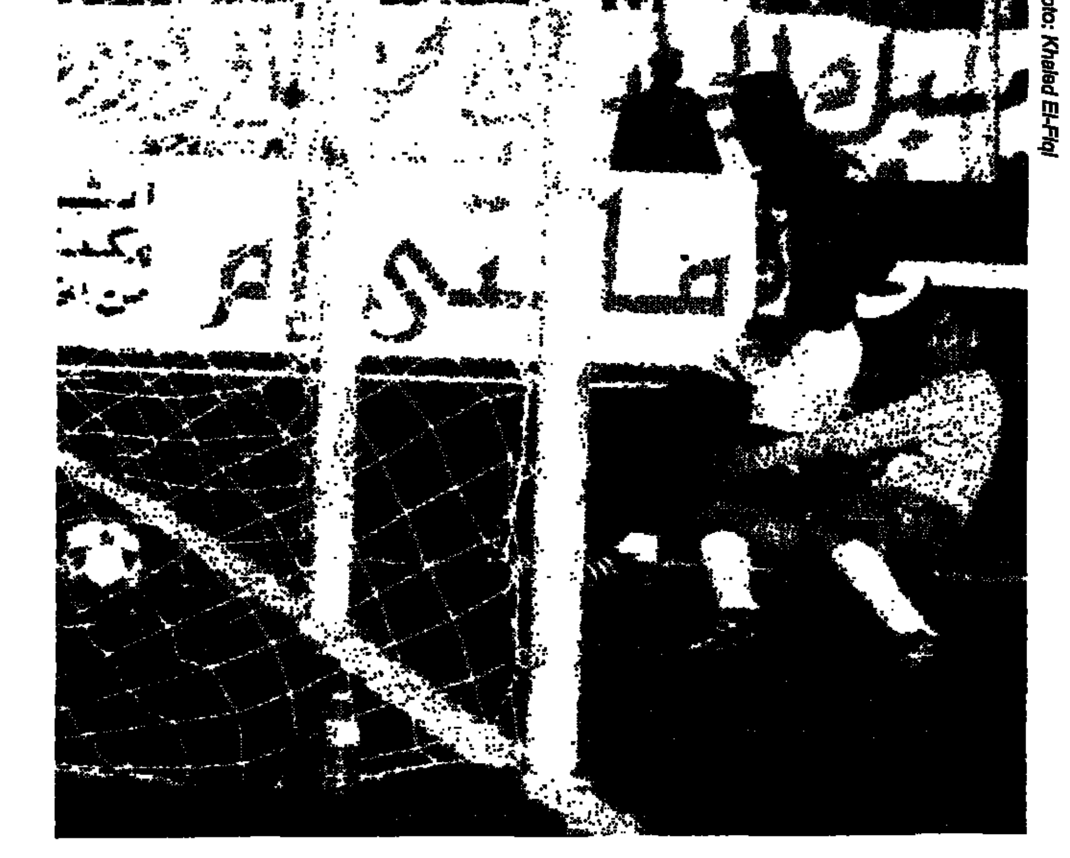


photo: Khaled El-Fiql

Scandalous defeat

HOME fans at Ismailia Stadium, expecting a sure victory on home turf, were disappointed to find themselves witness to their team's rout at the hands of Ahli in week 18 of the Super Football League. Ahli unexpectedly took the match 6-0 and thus guaranteed themselves second place with 37 points while Ismailia stood still with 32 points.

The goals were spread evenly over the two halves with Mahmoud Abul-Dahb leading off as he scored the first goal in the second minute. He was followed six minutes later by Moushir Hanafi and Ahmed Felix in the 15th minute. In the second half, after 28 minutes of relentless play, Samir Kamouna netted the fourth goal and Walid Salah El-Din followed suit with the fifth goal in the 37th minute. The end of all hope for Ismailia fans evaporated when Hisham Hanafi kicked the sixth goal into the net in the 42nd minute.

The outcome was even more unexpected due to Ismailia's status as a super league team with a great history on top of the fact that they had drawn 1-1 with Ahli in the first leg match. The behaviour of the failed fans was exemplary as they left the stands to the estimated 2,000 Ahli fans to celebrate their victory. Their anger was reserved for the Ismailia technical manager, Clement Westerhof, who they held responsible for the defeat. Westerhof, on his way to a holiday in Holland, for his part placed the blame squarely on the shoulders of the goalkeeper Sayed El-Sewerki and the defence.

Not so fast

THE ETHIOPIAN great Haile Gebrselassie's effort to break his own world indoor record in the 3,000 metres came to naught at the Karlsruhe meet. Gebrselassie, who had said before the meeting that he was determined to set a new mark, was clocked in at 7:31.28, missing his record of 7:30.72 set in Stuttgart on 4 February 1996.

Gebrselassie would have won a premium of 20,000 marks had he set a new record. The Ethiopian also holds the outdoor world record at 5,000 metres and is the Olympic and world champion in the 10,000.

Still the best

BARCELONA gold medalist Linford Christie of Britain, finishing in 10.30 seconds, won the 100m at the Hobart Grand Prix meet. The 36-year-old grandfather powered home to defeat Australian Steve Brimacombe (10.45) and Belgian Patrick Stevens (10.48).

"It's my first trip to Hobart and the crowd was fantastic — I'm happy I can still keep the youngsters at bay," Christie said. The Briton looked under some threat from Brimacombe and Stevens at the halfway mark but moved up a gear at the finish to finish the clear winner.

Had enough

MARCO "The Devil" Etcheverry, the first man to be sent off in the opening match of a World Cup final, has retired from international football. The Bolivian striker claimed he was fed up with criticism from the public as the reason for his decision.

Etcheverry, who failed to score in the 1-1 home draw with Chile in last Wednesday's World Cup qualifier, complained that he was bearing the brunt of the criticism from the press and supporters. "The Devil", who announced his retirement on his wedding day, staked his place in football history when he was sent off only four minutes after coming on as a substitute in Bolivia's match with Germany in the 1994 World Cup finals.

Violence down under

A LEADING Australian soccer player has been left blinded in one eye after rival fans attacked his team's bus. Adelaide City midfielder, Angelo Costanzo, 21, said a gang of up to 20 youths ambushed the bus as it left South Melbourne's home ground after Adelaide City scored a 2-0 victory in a National Soccer League match.

Two other players, Dino Mennillo and John Gibson, also suffered cuts as the fans threw rocks and bottles through the windows of the vehicle.

Battle of the wits

THE WORLD chess champion Garry Kasparov of Russia beat his compatriot Vladimir Kramnik in the 11th and last round of Linares tournament in southern Spain.

Kasparov won the category 19 contest outright by a clear one-point margin with 8.5 points from 11 games, ahead of Kramnik with 7.5. Kramnik had held a half-point lead with just the last two rounds to play.

The strain

BRITAIN'S Greg Rusedski, who was leading world number-one Pete Sampras by a set in the final of the ATP Tour men's tennis tournament, was forced out with a wrist injury. Rusedski, the seventh seed, had his wrist taped, but retired when he lost the fifth game and the first two points of the sixth.

Fishing in Hurghada

THE EGYPTIAN Angling Federation and Hurghada's Marine Sports Club will sponsor the Red Sea's International Fishing Tournament on 23-28 February. The competition will begin next Monday morning at the club's marina, where more than 20 Egyptian, Arab and foreign teams will converge for the event.

According to Youssef Abdel-Fattah, president of the Hurghada Marine Sports Club and head of the tournament's organising committee, the fishing will be done by trolling, using rod, reel and line. Other means of fishing are forbidden. The teams will fish for sailfish, tuna, jack-trevally, wahoo, barracuda, amber jack, spotted grouper, dolphin-fish and bonito. To be included in the competition, fish must weigh at least 3kg, except for bonito and dolphin-fish, which should not weigh less than 2kg.

Abdel-Fattah said that the competition would take place in the Red Sea, within Egypt's territorial borders, excluding Ras Mohamed and all other nature reserves. Each team consists of four members, and these members and their navigation crew are the only persons permitted on the boats during the contest.

Edited by **Inas Mazhar**

Al-Ahram Weekly

Louis Greiss:

The pundit's portion

Walking in strangers' funerals is how it all began. Then the tickers reeled him in

photo: Randa Shaath

His uncle called him Reuter when he was a little boy. The Greiss family lived on El-Gedid Street, the main street in Abu Tig, and whenever little Louis heard something that he considered of consequence, he would tear down the street, stopping at the house of each one of the Greiss's relatives — and there were many — to relate the incident. "I made it my business to find out what was going on. Once I found out, I felt it was my duty to share the information with as many people as possible."

When he was not disseminating news, Louis enjoyed walking in funerals. Whenever the church bell tolled, announcing a death, he would hurry to the church and take his place within the procession following the deceased, whom he did not know, all the way to the cemetery, crying with the family. "I don't know why, but I enjoyed the atmosphere of funerals in those days."

Louis Greiss grew out of liking funerals a long time ago, but he remembers his childhood as happy and normal. His parents charted the course of his life, but Greiss says fate kept getting in their way. "My parents wanted me to be a doctor, but my *Thanawiyya Amma* grades were too low. I applied to the Faculty of Medicine of Alexandria University but was half a point short." He enrolled in the Faculty of Science instead.

The dean of the faculty, Dr Hussein Fawzi, known as *El-Sindibad El-Masri* (Sindbad the Egyptian) — because of a popular series of articles he wrote for *Al-Ahram* under the title of *Sindibadiyat* — was a passionate musicologist and historian among other keen interests. He customarily invited first-year students to his house every Thursday for a musical evening. Tea, cakes and musical appreciation were not the only offerings, however. Fawzi discussed all sorts of topics with his students and encouraged them to take part in extracurricular activities.

For some reason, Greiss chose to join the journalism club. He remained at the Faculty of Science for two years, but somehow he did not feel at home there. One day, he asked Fawzi how one went about becoming a journalist. Fawzi suggested the American University in Cairo, and Greiss needed no further encouragement. He enrolled in 1951.

His family was less than pleased, but gave in to Greiss. His stipend paid for his classes and a room at the hostel. He took to his new life with enthusiasm and graduated with high honours. He was told that *Al-Ahram* was hiring students who had graduated top of their class. But instead of the smooth career he was led to believe awaited him, doors now began to close in his face. When he went to *Al-Ahram* to apply for a job, he was told the organisation no longer took in graduates.

He went back to AUC and joined the Development Service Department, made an unsuccessful attempt to work for *Al-Gomhouria*, and worked for a while at Dar El-Hilal, sticking maquettes on large sheets of cardboard. It was as close as he had ever been to real journalism and, in a way, he did not mind the job.

Fate once more changed his course when he met artist Hassan Fouad, who offered him a position at Rose El-Youssef Organisation albeit at a much lower salary than he was getting at Dar El-Hilal for his menial job. Greiss was not really interested in the money, though. His parents still sent him a small amount every month and, with the small salary he would receive, he figured that he could make ends meet.

He did not hesitate, and met Ahmed Bahaaeddin, the future editor-in-chief of the new magazine Rose El-Youssef was launching, *Sabah El-Kheir*. Bahaaeddin offered him a job reporting for the new publication. Greiss's dream was finally becoming reality, he had become a journalist.

While at a loose end in his career, Greiss had applied for a scholarship to study for a year in the US. He had made third place, and quickly forgot the whole thing. While he was happily settling down at *Sabah El-Kheir*, he received a letter from AUC. The first two candidates had declined the scholarship; it was now offered to him. Bahaaeddin encouraged him to go. Ihsan Abdel-Quddous, then editor-in-chief of *Rose El-Youssef*, and general manager of the organisation, was instrumental in his final decision. "A year in college is worth a thousand books you may read on the US."

Soon Greiss, was enrolled in Ann Arbour, Michigan. He by-lined the articles he sent to *Sabah El-Kheir* "Louis Greiss, reporting from Washington," believing that nobody had heard of Ann Arbour. "I did not realise it was a famous university." Reporting from Washington sounded much more prestigious, he thought.

While in the States, he started training with several newspapers and the year abroad became three, until one day he received a letter from Abdel-Quddous. "What are you still doing there?" wrote Abdel-Quddous. "Come back, your desk awaits you." Memories of *Sabah El-Kheir* and his dreams of becoming a famous Egyptian journalist propelled him back to Cairo.

On his return, he became managing editor of *Sabah El-Kheir*, "and in 1968 I became co-editor-in-chief, together with Mahmoud El-Saadani." Later he became the sole editor-in-chief of the magazine, from 1980 to 1989, when he retired. When he thought about his career, Greiss had only imagined himself as a political commentator. "When I came back from the States, I felt I had matured enough to really get my career going, and I wrote what I considered my first article of consequences. Abdel-Nasser was going to deliver a speech the following day. At the time every newspaper had a censor who read all the articles before publication. He called me in. 'I know that you have come back, and I am sure that your mistake was made in good faith, so I will keep our little conversation a secret. In your article, you are commenting on what should or should not be done and giving us your personal opinion. You are only required to listen carefully to the *Rais*'s speech, then bring out its main points, praising them. We are not interested in anything else.'" Greiss took up translation.

He had discovered that he could always select foreign short stories which conveyed a message with which he agreed. His political commentary was his choice of story. "The public understood at once. I have a whole correspondence from my readers at the time to prove it."

Greiss derived immense satisfaction from his work as a translator. Sobhi Greiss of the Anglo-Egyptian Library used to leave a stack of books on Bahaaeddin's desk every month, telling Louis to pick those he wanted. This custom was discontinued in the '60s, when foreign books were no longer imported as a matter of course. "In the old days," recalls Greiss nostalgically, "when a film was premiered it was shown simultaneously in Paris, London, New York and Cairo, and the same applied to books, which were on the shelves of bookshops in the four capitals on the same day."

Deprived of his regular supply, Louis began searching libraries, AUC's in particular, for relevant works to translate. In a few years, 500 short stories became accessible to the public in Arabic translation, thanks to his efforts.

Sometimes, when he was unable to find works pertinent to the message he was trying to pass on, he would write his own short story. "I liked Abdel-Quddous's writings and tried to use his technique to decide on the topics I would address in my stories." Abdel-Quddous used to come out of his room and ask a question when he was short of ideas, recounts Greiss. Everyone would give him an answer. One of them would set him going. "Once I was instrumental in the writing of one of his stories: Abdel-Quddous asked me about love in Upper Egypt. He wanted to know what we thought of love in Abu Tig. 'Love is a sin there,' I told him. Then I told him about an incident that had happened in our town when I was 15. A new government official had settled in our town. He was unmarried and lived with his sister, who looked after his house. The sister was pretty and soon caught the eye of the *umda*'s son. Everyone thought that they would make a perfect match. When the *umda* asked for the girl's hand for his son, however, the government official flew into a rage and practically threw the *umda* out. Soon after, the couple left town, to everyone's surprise. My older brother, who had befriended the government official, told me the truth: the sister was in fact the man's girlfriend: they had been forced to flee before anyone found out. In Abu Tig such behaviour would not have been looked upon kindly. When Ihsan wrote *Ukhti* (My Sister), this incident was his inspiration.

I used the same method, finding out the most urgent problems facing society at a particular moment, then tailoring my stories to the message I wanted to convey." Greiss wrote 200 topical short stories, thus avoiding the censor's attention, which was directed neither towards translations of foreign literature nor short stories by Egyptian authors.

He continued to consolidate his position at Rose El-Youssef Organisation, now under the chairmanship of Abdel-Rahman El-Sharqawi, but, says Greiss, this was not without its drawbacks. "It is a good thing that I have a forgiving nature, and have never been able to hold a grudge against anyone. During these years I was summoned seven times by the prosecutor-general, every time on false charges. I knew I was moving upward every time I received a summons. Someone had heard that I was up for promotion and was trying to stop me. I was cleared every time. The worst time was when I was about to be nominated managing director of Rose El-Youssef Organisation. El-Sharqawi gave me three days to prove my innocence. At first I thought it would be an impossible task, that my career would grind to a halt, but luck was on my side and I managed to get the relevant documents that exonerated me from all the false accusations being levelled against me."

Greiss thinks that newspapers' administrative managers should always be picked from among journalists and layout personnel, who are aware of the problems faced by journalists, managing editors and editors-in-chief. Accountants won't do, he says. All they worry about is saving money, even at the expense of good journalism. "I believe that gifted editors-in-chief should be given all the means available to produce a good paper. Nothing should be too much. Artists and good reporters should be given encouragement and support every step of the way. When El-Sharqawi was chairman of Rose El-Youssef Organisation, he attracted an outstanding team, people like Hassan Fouad, Salah Hafez and Fathi Ghanem among others. I was editor-in-chief of *Sabah El-Kheir* during that same period and sales of both magazines combined rocketed to unprecedented heights.

After the bread riots of 1977, Sadat called El-Sharqawi and told him that he would have to go because *Rose El-Youssef* had become a political party unto itself. We made public opinion, really."

Today, Greiss is retired from his administrative post at *Rose El-Youssef* and although he writes a weekly column, *Saqata Sahwan* (Oversight), for the magazine, his heart is elsewhere: he has gone back to his alma mater as an adviser and teaches translation in journalism. "It has been such a useful tool that I want young journalists to master the art of translation," he says.

Furthermore, Greiss has great respect for today's generation. Second to his beloved Rose El-Youssef, it is teaching that interests him most.

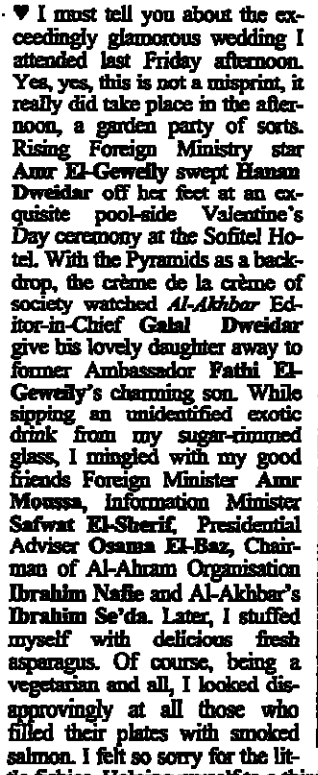
As Louis Greiss leaves the office, a neat, sharp-featured man, immaculately dressed, he looks back for a moment. He is unobtrusive and understated, as a journalist must be. But there is a definite twinkle in his eye.

Profile by Fayza Hassan

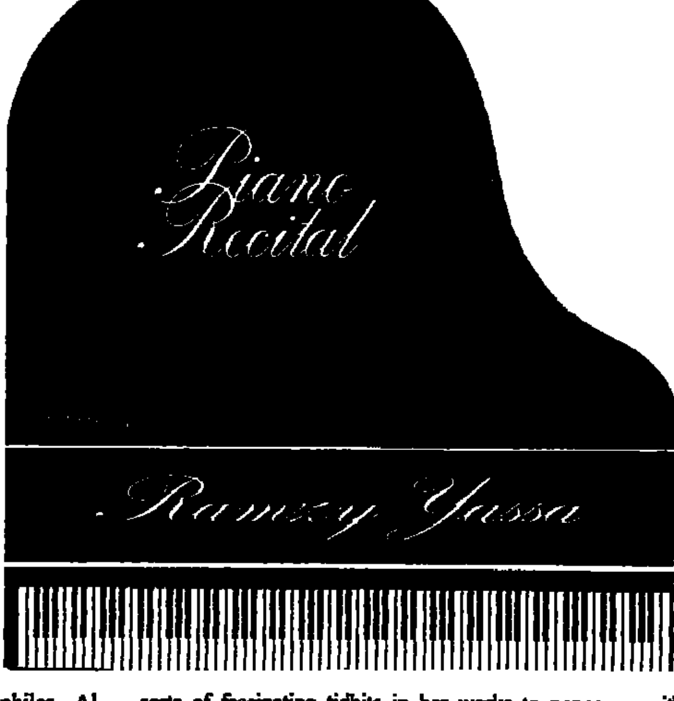
Pack of Cards

by Madame Sosostris

♥ I must tell you about the exceedingly glamorous wedding I attended last Friday afternoon. Yes, yes, this is not a misprint, it really did take place in the afternoon, a garden party of sorts. Rising Foreign Ministry star **Amr El-Gewelly** swept **Hanan Dweidar** off her feet at an exquisite pool-side Valentine's Day ceremony at the Sofitel Hotel. With the Pyramids as a backdrop, the crème de la crème of society watched *Al-Akhbar* Editor-in-Chief **Galal Dweidar** give his lovely daughter away to former Ambassador **Fathi El-Gewelly**'s charming son. While sipping an unidentified exotic drink from my sugar-rimmed glass, I mingled with my good friends Foreign Minister **Amr Moussa**, Information Minister **Safwat El-Sherif**, Presidential Adviser **Osama El-Baz**, Chairman of Al-Ahram Organisation **Ibrahim Nafie** and Al-Akhbar's **Ibrahim Se'da**. Later, I stuffed myself with delicious fresh asparagus. Of course, being a vegetarian and all, I looked disapprovingly at all those who filled their plates with smoked salmon. I felt so sorry for the little fishies. Helping myself to a third generous portion of sautéed champignons, I fondly reminisced on the weddings of my youth, where there were swing bands instead of the hyperactive band who kept the jubilant crowd of spritely youth on their feet all afternoon. While they hopped to the savage beat, I listened to the bush telephone, a much more reliable instrument than all these cellulars which you can never trust with your more intimate secrets. Guess what I know now? The groom is going to surprise the bride with a romantic honeymoon in Florida before the newlyweds head for Washington DC, where Amr is posted at the Egyptian Embassy.









Clockwise: The lucky newlyweds, Amr and Hanan; Ramzy Yassa; Margo Veillon's self-portrait; Jill Kamil's latest book; Al-Ahram's general manager, Ali Ghoneim with artist Mona Mahmoud

♦ Being at the Sofitel Hotel once more made me think of **Ramzy Yassa**'s concert, which I attended last week with all of Cairo's pianophiles. Although deprived of the Pyramids as a backdrop, this particular Sofitel being in Maadi, the venue was bathed in romanticism. There was plenty to dream about as the prodigious pianist launched into Soler's *Sonata in g minor*. **Yassa** had the audience riveted to the tips of his flying fingers until the last note of Liszt's *Rigoletto* .

♣ After such a refreshing and stimulating musical experience, I had to keep those little grey cells humming and what better way than to start on the exciting tome our own **Jill Kamil** has just produced, *The Ancient Egyptians, Life in the Old Kingdom* published by the American University in Cairo Press. **Jill** is amazingly knowledgeable, really. One can find all sorts of fascinating tidbits in her works to pepper one's conversation with, to one's advantage. As soon as I am in the limelight again — and this is bound to be soon of course — I will make sure to dazzle my admirers with veiled hints at the Heliopolis Doctrine. I bet only the selected few know about it.

♠ As I was worrying about what I would nourish my intellect with, who else would call but my good friend **Mohamed Mahmoud El-Gawhari**, president of the University of Helwan. And guess what? He had just the thing I was looking for: Among the many activities of this university, something of a novelty has been introduced; the university of Helwan is having its own book fair for the opening of which, on 24 February, a day's programme has been organised with a special bus picking up the visitors in front of the Faculty of Tourism in Manial, taking them to Ein Helwan and bringing them back at the end of the day. On that day I will put my seven-league boots to rest and take my ogre sack to fill not with little children but with good books.

♥ No matter how exciting books are, they do not replace visual arts especially when what has to be visualised are paintings by **Mona Mahmoud** which are exhibited in the Al-Ahram lobby. Mona's paintings are all about Egypt and the popular quarters and some of the views have so enchanted visitors that they keep coming back every year. Well dears, this is one exhibition I really enjoyed and which reminded me how much I like to walk around Cairo (incognito of course). Having congratulated the artist and Al-Ahram's General Manager **Ali Ghoneim** who opened the exhibition, I took to the streets.

♦ Can you believe it, **Margo Veillon**, the Egyptian born Swiss artist, is ninety. Yes, that's right, ninety. And to mark the occasion Cairo Berlin gallery is hosting an exhibition of self-portraits, while yesterday **Margo** herself presided over a birthday bash on Le Pasha, in Zamalek, to which guests brought along cards and mementos, all A4 sized, which will be bound into a commemorative book. Needless to say I racked my brains for weeks deciding what I should take, and then plumped for... well, readers, I'm afraid that will have to remain a secret that I share only with the grande dame herself.